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THE CAREER OF VICTOR HUGO

BY

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PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is to provide in English the facts of Victor Hugo's literary and public career, and to analyze and interpret his principal works in the light of the best modern scholarship. I had originally intended a complete biography, but the publication in 1942 of Mr. Matthew Josephson's highly readable *Victor Hugo* interfered with that plan. Mr. Josephson's volume concentrates on the action of Hugo's life. A book in English dealing more thoroughly with the poet's literary production, while not neglecting his important public career, still seemed desirable. This book, therefore, emphasizes Hugo's work, omits inconsequential biographical facts and anecdotes, includes those that throw light on Hugo's writings, and presents the essential facts concerning his political evolution.

Whereas in regard to Hugo's political career I have always held opinions such as Mr. Josephson expresses, my studies have forced me to quite different conclusions from his in several important matters, notably the Sainte-Beuve-Mme Hugo affair, and the proper interpretation of Hugo's theater and his novels.

The problem of whether to quote Hugo in the original French or in English translation I have solved by a compromise. I have put his prose into English, but, assuming that my readers would have some knowledge of French, I have left his poetry unspoiled by any translation.

I have tried not to clutter up my pages with too many footnotes. The sources of my information will, therefore, be found principally in the bibliographies at the back of the book. Let me make it clearly understood here and now that I have gratefully utilized the work of preceding scholars. For example, in my chapter on *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu* I have leaned heavily on Mr. H. J. Hunt's recent book, and have made, I think, rea-

sonable acknowledgment without accumulating numberless footnotes.

Throughout, I have asked myself what a person seriously interested in Hugo's work would want or need to know, and have sought to compile a book which, if not completely original, would at least have the merit of being useful.

I am greatly indebted to the editors of the *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* and to the editors of the *Romanic Review* who have kindly allowed me to use material from articles which appeared in those publications; in the first case, from "Victor Hugo during the Second Republic" (*Smith College Studies* . . . , 1935); in the second, from "Exile's Return" (*Romanic Review*, 1939).

The publication of this book was in part made possible by a grant from the Class of 1900 Fund of Williams College, and I herewith express my deep appreciation.

Several colleagues have been kind enough to read part or all of my manuscript. To them, as well as to my wife who has helped me in numberless ways, I am very grateful.

E. M. G.

Williamstown, Mass
January 1, 1945

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THE CAREER OF VICTOR HUGO

*Que la société fasse toujours pour
l'individu autant que la nature.*

— CLAUDE GUEUX

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Ce siècle avait deux ans.

— V. H.

VICTOR HUGO, destined to become the singer of Napoleon's martial glories, happened to be born in one of those few interludes when the Corsican was not at war with Europe. Negotiations with England and Spain leading to the triumphant but short-lived peace of Amiens, preparations for the proclamation and execution of the recently signed Concordat were absorbing the attention of Frenchmen in the wintry days of 1802. Mme de Stael who had upset the canons of literary criticism in 1800 with her *De la littérature* was on the point of publishing her first novel, *Delphine*. Chateaubriand had won fame a year before with *Atala* and in the year of Hugo's birth gained greater renown with a more imposing work, *Le Génie du christianisme*. Thomas Jefferson, a friend and admirer of the French people, had been inaugurated President of the United States in March of the preceding year. These were the events which had just occurred or were looming on the historical and literary horizon as Sophie Hugo, with her two small sons, Abel and Eugène, joined her husband in his new garrison at Besançon in eastern France. He had but lately been in command of the fortified town of Lunéville in Lorraine. Now he found himself transferred for a few short months to the capital of Franche-Comté. And there, at Besançon, on the twenty-sixth of February, a third son, Victor-Marie, was born.

In spite of a robust inheritance which was later to provide him with an incredible vitality, the child was puny at birth:

Un enfant sans couleur, sans regard et sans voix.

Yet, on the paternal side at least, he was descended from strong peasant stock. His grandfather had been a cabinetmaker. His military father, Léopold-Sigisbert Hugo, was a courageous, vigorous, lusty officer who had married in 1797 Sophie Trébuchet, a Breton girl of Nantes, an ardent royalist though not a devout Catholic for she had been nurtured by a widowed aunt whose favorite author was Voltaire. Sophie was a willful, determined creature who had not hesitated to risk her own neck in order to save from the guillotine more than one possible victim of republican anger. There is a story to the effect that she met her future husband while helping some priests and Vendean rebels to escape, and that she distracted Leopold Hugo's attention while the enemies of the Republic stole away. That audacity was characteristic. In later years Pierre Foucher (Victor Hugo's father-in-law) said that Mme Hugo was endowed with an "iron character," "a harsh will," and "masculine virtues." These qualities or defects led inevitably to difficulties between husband and wife. During their first years of married life they had already clashed with regrettable frequency, and they were destined to quarrel more violently still. But in this month of February 1802 they were momentarily united in a common satisfaction at the birth of their third child (even though his sex was disappointing) and in a common concern for his survival.

The iron in Sophie's character produced in this situation admirable results.

Je vous dirai peut-être quelque jour
Quel lait pur, que de soins, que de vœux, que d'amour,
Prodigués pour ma vie en naissant condamnée,
M'ont fait deux fois l'enfant de ma mère obstinée

Mme Hugo's care and determination saved the child so successfully that, even if still delicate, it was soon possible to move him from Besançon to Marseilles where military duties had called his father. This was the beginning of a series of peregrinations

which marked Hugo's childhood. Corsica and Elba, Italy, and Spain, with intervals spent in Paris comprise the list, and are celebrated in the poem "Mon enfance" which Hugo composed in 1823. But of the three journeys only that to Spain is of genuine significance in Hugo's work. The island of Elba, *cette île en noirs débris féconde*, Rome, *toujours vivante au fond de ses tombeaux*, and Naples, *que Vésuve en feu couvre d'un dais brûlant*, were all seen by Hugo at too tender an age to have left any important imprint on his mind. More significant to the family were the intervals spent in Paris. They coincided, of course, with separations between husband and wife, separations during which both husband and wife not only drifted farther apart, but became involved in other emotional engagements.

One of the first occurred in the late autumn of 1802. Leopold Hugo had got himself into trouble by making exaggerated charges against the commander of his regiment. An investigation had failed to uphold these accusations and had led to the conclusion that Hugo's conduct was harmful to the discipline and morale of the troops. He stood in danger of being court-martialed and dishonorably discharged. In these circumstances Sophie agreed to go to Paris to see what could be done. She arrived there in December, and by appealing to Joseph Bonaparte and General Clarke, and by persuading General Victor La Horie to intercede, she succeeded in preventing the worst. Leopold was not cashiered, but was ordered to garrison duty in Corsica and a little later in Elba. These were obscure posts which constituted a partial disgrace. But, this accomplished, Sophie Hugo did not return at once to her husband and children, for General La Horie, a friend of the couple and after whom her third son was named, proved a greater attraction, and she went to his estate near Vernon on the Seine.¹ The General had fallen in love with her, and he was in her eyes a far more attractive figure than her irascible and irresponsible husband. La Horie,

¹ For a full treatment of the relations between Sophie Hugo and General La Horie, see L. Guimbaud, *La Mère de Victor Hugo* (Plon, 1930)

moreover, had joined the Moreau conspiracy against the First Consul. The royalist Sophie approved of this activity and admired her lover all the more

Meanwhile, this separation had led to serious consequences at the other end Leopold Hugo at first wrote impassioned letters to his wife, but he consoled himself ere long with a girl by the name of Catherine Thomas, the daughter of an orderly in the military hospital at Elba. She remained his mistress for years and ultimately became his wife.

Sophie Hugo finally went to Elba, not to stay with her husband, but to collect her children and return with them to Paris. To this Leopold Hugo not too reluctantly agreed. It was expected that renewed war with Britain would lead to an attack on Elba which was, therefore, no place for small children. Domestic quarrels were frequent. Probably Leopold Hugo saw his wife depart in November 1803 with a feeling of relief.

For two years Sophie Hugo lived with her children at number 24 rue de Clichy. She saw as much as possible of La Horie, but his connection with the Moreau conspiracy had been discovered and much of his time was spent in dodging the police. The children went to school. In 1805 and 1806 Victor, young as he was, attended a little establishment in the rue du Mont-Blanc. He perhaps learned to read there, though he claims to have taught himself. When not in school he played in the garden back of the house.

In 1806 Leopold Hugo was at long last allowed to return to active service. He apparently distinguished himself in Italy, for Joseph Bonaparte (made King of Naples by his brother) promoted him to a colonelship and appointed him governor of Avellino. Then Sophie Hugo decided to return to her husband. In 1807 Victor Hugo's childish eyes looked upon the famous bay of Naples with Vesuvius smoking in the background. Whatever his mother's motive (it was certainly not affection for her husband), the sojourn was not of long duration. Colonel Hugo lived at Avellino with his mistress; Mme Hugo and the

boys lived at Naples. In 1808 mother and sons returned to Paris.

The three years (1808-1811) dividing the Italian and Spanish journeys saw the first installation of Mme Hugo and her children in the building which had formerly been the Couvent des Feuillantines. There Victor Hugo's elementary education really began, for one can hardly count as genuine training the hours spent in 1805 and 1806 in the little school located in the rue du Mont-Blanc. In 1808 Mme Hugo decided to put Abel in a near-by *collège* and to send Victor and Eugène to a school run by a certain Larivière and his wife. This Larivière was a former priest, a well-educated man, who had married during the Revolution. He taught the boys to write and to spell; he taught them arithmetic and history, he even taught them some elements of Latin. Victor La Horie, however, taught them more, for in 1809, still hunted by the imperial police, he took refuge, to the great pleasure of Sophie Hugo, in the Feuillantines. There he whiled away some of the long hours of his concealment by supervising the boys' education. He went over their exercises, he read Tacitus with Victor; after dinner he told them stories.

But the great charm of the Feuillantines in Victor Hugo's memory lay in the garden where he spent long hours with his brother. There the Foucher children, Paul and Adèle, were brought to join them. In later years Hugo told of the delight which the very first glimpse of the garden gave his brothers and himself.

It was not a garden, it was a park, a wood, a countryside. They took possession of it on the very instant, running, calling to each other, losing sight of one another, thinking themselves lost, enraptured! Their eyes were not big enough, nor their legs long enough. Every moment they discovered new things — "See what I've found" — "That's nothing" — "Here! here!" There was a walk lined with chestnut trees where a swing could be set up. There was a dry cistern which would be admirable for playing war and making attacks. There were countless, undreamed of flowers; but above all there were corners

which had not been cultivated for a long time and where everything grew that would: herbs, plants, bushes, a virgin forest made for a child. There was so much fruit that they could not gather what fell from the branches.

A land of milk and honey and a land of freedom! Such did this garden seem to Hugo's childish eyes; such did it ever remain in his memory.

The journey to Spain interrupted his idyllic existence. Leopold Hugo had gone there from Italy, following Joseph Bonaparte whose favor he still enjoyed. His wife was led to join him, not, as has been claimed, through any marital affection or pressure, but for quite different reasons. Leopold's young brother Louis Hugo first suggested it to her in the fall of 1810. At the end of December La Horie was arrested, and all of Sophie's efforts to secure his release were fruitless. On top of this, assurance came from people close to Joseph Bonaparte that he was anxious to see Hugo's domestic situation regularized. So on March 15, 1811 Mme Hugo and her children left Paris for Spain. The Count — for Leopold had acquired that title in Joseph's service — was entirely ignorant of their departure.

Twelve years later Hugo wrote:

L'Espagne m'accueillit, livrée à la conquête
Je franchis le Bergare, où mugit la tempête,
De loin, pour un tombeau je pris l'Escorial,
Et le triple aqueduc vit s'incliner ma tête
Devant son front impérial

In these and other lines Victor Hugo has suggested the importance of this experience. The trip itself — from Paris to Madrid, through the village of Ernani, past the ruins of Torquemada, thence to Burgos, Valladolid, and Toledo, with dramatic evidences of war on every side — the poet has described with special charm and emphasis in *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*.² But equally important is the year's so-

² This hook was compiled by Mme Victor Hugo many years later (See page 204.) Hugo dictated much of it to his wife

journ in Madrid which includes the family's residence in the Masserano palace and the boys' attendance at the Collège des Nobles in the street named Ortoleza.

Joseph Bonaparte was unfortunately absent from Madrid when Mme Hugo arrived. So was the Count! But he soon returned, furious at his wife's unannounced appearance and determined to solve his problem by divorce. The return of his master put an end to that notion, for Joseph compelled him to accept Sophie's presence and to present her to the court. Leopold insisted, nevertheless, that the younger children attend the *Colegio*, and when he learned, as he somehow did, of the relations that had existed between his wife and La Horie, he broke with her again and returned openly to Catherine Thomas. Sophie immediately countered with appeals to Joseph Bonaparte who finally allowed her to take her sons and return to France. As military events were taking a bad turn for the French, it was well from every point of view that she did so.

Until this journey to Spain, it is probable that Victor Hugo was unconscious of the sordid quarreling of his parents. But in 1811 he was nine years old and could not help sensing the domestic situation. His father naturally stood in a less favorable light to him than did his mother. As he put it later in the *Victor Hugo raconté*, his father was to him and his brothers "a sort of stranger who appeared before them in Madrid only to imprison them in the College of Nobles," while their mother represented in their eyes "freedom and poetry."

Except for such a passage one finds in Hugo's work only enchanting glimpses of the year in Spain. Ernani provided him with a hero, the Masserano palace, with a setting,⁸ the seminary, with a hunchback, Corcova, destined to be transformed into Quasimodo, the bell-ringer of Notre-Dame; the very street Ortoleza, with a sonorous name which reappeared in *Ruy Blas*. All this was to enrich his literary work and contribute to the brilliance of his romanticism.

Meanwhile Sophie and her children returned in March 1812

⁸ The third act of *Hernani*.

to the serenity of the Feuillantines. The garden was as lovely as ever.

Le jardin était grand, profond, mystérieux,
Fermé par de hauts murs aux regards curieux,
Semé de fleurs s'ouvrant ainsi que des paupières
Et d'insectes vermeils qui couraient sur les pierres,
Plein de bourdonnements et de confuses voix,
Au milieu, presque un champ, dans le fond, presque un bois

Here, once again, the Foucher children joined them, and for nearly two years they relived their precious idyl. There was, to be sure, one important difference. La Horie was no longer there. He was still in prison, still untried after more than a year. From within his jail he was foolish enough to join in a new conspiracy against the Emperor. It was inevitably discovered, and this time there was no delay in bringing La Horie to trial. He was condemned to death by a court-martial, and on October 29, 1812 he was taken out and shot. It was a blow from which Sophie Hugo never completely recovered.

The winter and spring of 1813-14 brought several events of importance. At the end of December Mme Hugo was forced, both for reasons of economy and because of the imminent expropriation of the Feuillantines, to leave that beloved residence. Since June 1813 Joseph Bonaparte had ceased to be King of Spain. Hugo was consequently unable to send his wife the monthly allotment which Joseph had ordered him to pay. As Sophie's income was greatly reduced, she moved to number 2 in the rue des Vieilles-Thuilleries, the house which today is numbered 44 in the rue du Cherche-Midi. Then, in January, Leopold Hugo was placed in command of the fortified town of Thionville. Although, before the year was out, he was destined to distinguish himself by his heroic defense of Thionville against an army of the anti-Napoleonic coalition, the immediate effect of his appointment was disastrous to his family. He stopped sending any funds whatever to his wife. Sophie immediately went to Thionville and started legal action against

him. Interminable and complicated quarrels followed. The courts, in October 1814, ordered separate domiciles for husband and wife, decreed that Sophie should receive a hundred francs a month, and that the younger children, Eugène and Victor, should continue at the Pension Cordier (near Saint-Germain-des-Prés) where Leopold Hugo had recently sent them. Four years later a more formal and definite separation was ordered by the civil court of the Seine

Victor Hugo and his brothers were now more than ever conscious of the domestic situation. The General was in open conflict with Sophie Hugo and forbade the boys even to see their mother whom he referred to in his correspondence as his "démon." He was himself retired on half pay and living in Blois with Catherine Thomas. In these circumstances he was unable to do more for his sons than pay their bills at the Pension Cordier and provide them with a pitifully meager allowance. Leading this restricted and unhappy existence, Victor and Eugène had no recourse but grimly to pursue their studies. The Cordier establishment sent its more advanced pupils to take courses offered by the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. For two years, from 1816 to 1818, Victor Hugo studied at this Lycée under Guillard, Lefébure de Fourcy, Laran, and Biscarrat, teachers whose names have been preserved largely because of their illustrious pupil. That he was a diligent and successful student is clear from the records he achieved. His academic labors, however, did not prevent him from absorbing Chateaubriand whose work he apparently read during Laran's classes with nearly disastrous results. Nor did they keep him from trying his own hand at literary composition. From this period date his earliest poems, many of them being translations from Vergil.

They are of interest chiefly because they reveal already in Victor Hugo a fundamental taste for the grandiose, the tremendous, the horrific. "L'Antre des Cyclopes" and "Cacus," both inspired by the eighth book of the *Æneid*, have that touch of

epic grandeur and epic terror which the mature poet was to achieve so well. Encouraged by one of his teachers, Felix Biscarrat, the boy composed during his three years at the Pension Cordier not only these Vergilian translations, but odes, satires, elegies, idyls, a tragedy entitled *Irtamène*, and even, according to the *Victor Hugo raconté*, a comic opera.

Irtamène, like the odes and satires, reflects the royalist opinions of Mme Hugo, for the play deals with the attempt of a faithful soldier, Irtamène, to restore to power his dethroned king. Since everything ends happily, with the punishment of the usurper and the crowning of the legitimate king, the drama is not properly a tragedy. These fifteen hundred lines were primarily written as a New Year's gift to the young poet's mother. On the cover of the notebook in which the couplets were penned Victor made a little sketch of a king with his crown and wrote four times. *Vive le Roi!* And accompanying this gift was a simple, explanatory quatrain.

Ce ne sont pas de ces fleurs immortelles
Dont Racine se pare au céleste banquet,
Ce sont des fleurs simples et naturelles
Comme mon cœur, maman, je t'en offre un bouquet

A year later the youthful poet was less satisfied with his performance, and wrote in satirical lines that Melpomene advised him to flee from her spell.

This severity toward his own productions was typical of the youngster. In the same year (1816) that he wrote *Irtamène* he composed a long poem on the flood *Le Déluge*, in three cantos, totaled three hundred and sixty-four lines. On the manuscript he jotted down his opinion of seventy-three of them:

20 mauvais
32 bons
15 très bons
5 passables
1 faible

but he could not have been satisfied with the remaining two hundred and eighty-one, for he wrote in verse to Abel:

Je crois, Abel, qu'en mon déluge,
Je me suis moi-même noyé.

An extraordinarily realistic and courageous attitude on the part of so young a poet. And a facile poet, too! In this single year of 1816 he wrote twenty-three poems of varying length in addition to *Le Déluge* and *Irtamène*.

The next year, at the age of fifteen, he determined to compete in the poetry contest of the French Academy. The announced subject, *Le Bonheur que procure l'étude dans toutes les situations de la vie*, was far from inspiring. But Hugo, taking his cue from his favorite Latin poet, adopted an elegiac tone and poured forth three hundred lines on the satisfactions of study in some quiet retreat with his "two beloved authors, Tibullus and Vergil." Assisted by Biscarrat, who chose for an afternoon's walk for his pupils a route passing in front of the Institute, Victor Hugo was able to deliver his manuscript to the proper office in time. Three months later, on August 28, 1817, the decisions of the Academy were announced and Victor discovered that he had been awarded an Honorable Mention, though the judges found it difficult to believe that he was truly but fifteen years old. He had mentioned his youth in the text and the Academicians commended him "si véritablement il n'a que cet âge." There was, of course, no doubt about that, and to prove it Hugo had only to send his birth certificate to M. Raynouard, the permanent secretary of the Academy. This he promptly did and so obtained further publicity in Paris.

Throughout this year and the next the lad continued to write. It was in 1817 that he composed those Vergilian translations already mentioned. In the autumn of that year he wrote "Achemenide" also inspired by the *Æneid*. Then came a *Conte* (in verse), stanzas entitled "Au sommeil," and in 1818 poems like "Les Derniers Bardes" and "La Canadienne," the

latter being suggested by Chateaubriand's *Atala*. But this year is also marked by the completion of his work at the Pension Cordier. At the age of sixteen he left that establishment with his formal education virtually completed.

On leaving school he was able to go to live with his mother. A court decision had at last given Sophie Hugo her desired separation, some alimony, and the right to have her children. As a consequence, Victor went with his brother Eugène to live at number 18 rue des Petits-Augustins (now the rue Bonaparte) where Mme Hugo was located. Abel was self-supporting; after two years in the royal army he was placed on *demi-solde*, and thus enabled to devote his time to literature and to business. The former interested him greatly, but he really excelled in the latter.

Victor's childhood was now over, a childhood marked by travel, by parental incompatibility, by varied and even haphazard schooling. Thanks to his mother it had been, with the exception of a few interludes, a happy period. Fortunately, too, his father had intervened often enough to assure that the boy had some formal scholastic training. He may not have enjoyed being "imprisoned," as he put it, in the College of Nobles in Madrid and in the Pension Cordier in Paris but he might never have acquired a suitable education without the work he did there. The sentimental memory of the Feuillantines which he carried through life is sometimes made to appear far more important than the training he got at the Parisian lycée. General Hugo did not divine his son's talent as soon as Sophie Hugo did. But in his blundering way he unwittingly contributed to the formation of that genius by placing Victor under competent instructors. Now for better or for worse that period of training was ended. New problems awaited solution: the trials of adolescence; above all, the choice of a career. But the finger of destiny had already touched him, for the young poet of the Pension Cordier had confided to his notebook his highest ambition: "I will be Chateaubriand or nothing."

Like Balzac, Victor Hugo, confronted with the choice of a profession, thought momentarily of the law, and he consequently registered for courses offered by the University. But to such a career he was still less suited than his great contemporary, and he abandoned it even sooner. The years immediately following his graduation from the Pension Cordier were in reality dominated by two interests. literature and love.

The object of his young affections was none other than Adèle Foucher, his childhood playmate of the Feuillantines. In the spring of 1819 he impetuously declared himself and found that his passion was returned. For a year they kept their secret, but when it was finally disclosed the most serious obstacle arose: Mme Hugo's adamant objection. She appears to have thought that such an alliance would not be sufficiently advantageous, and she did not fail to express her opinion with her customary vigor. Love, therefore, had to be stoically dominated, if not suppressed. Fortunately, literature was a constant solace and inspiration.

What is more, literary success came with astonishing speed. In 1819, at the age of seventeen, Victor Hugo won two prizes offered by the *Jeux floraux* (of the Academy of Toulouse) with his odes, "Les Vierges de Verdun" and "Le Rétablissement de la statue de Henri IV." The first had been composed in September or October of 1818 and, according to Ernest Dupuy, was suggested by lines of the second-rate poet of the late eighteenth century, the Abbé Delille. The subject of the second ode was suggested by the Academy itself, but it happened to suit Hugo well. He had chanced to take part in an interesting incident in connection with the statue. At the entrance to the Pont-Neuf the oxen pulling the heavy statue were unable to make the grade, and the statue was moved up the slope by an immense crowd, including young Hugo, which took pity on the beasts. But Hugo was delayed in writing his poem by a sudden illness of his mother, and the story goes that, urged on by her, he wrote it in one night as he sat by her bed. Perhaps these

circumstances gave the poem greater force and explain to some extent its success, for the secretary of the *Jeux floraux* wrote Hugo: "Your fine ode on the 'Rétablissement de la statue de Henri IV' has won the approval of all." Whereas the "Vierges de Verdun" had received only an "amarante réservée," the "Rétablissement" was awarded the coveted golden lily.

This same year the French Academy announced as subjects for poetic contest *L'Institution du jury en France* and *Avantages de l'enseignement mutuel*. Two less inspiring topics for a lyric poet could hardly be imagined. Nevertheless Hugo determined to compete and he managed to win new recognition from the great Academy with his poem on the second of the two subjects. It was given a "cinquième mention." Four months later he published a satirical poem, *Le Télégraphe*, and in December 1819 he founded, with his brothers' collaboration, a fortnightly review, *Le Conservateur littéraire*.

This review was obviously named after Chateaubriand's organ, *Le Conservateur*, and at first was the exclusive product of the Hugo brothers, with Victor playing by far the most important rôle. Little by little other collaborators came in. Mme Tastu, for example, contributed a poem, the Countess d'Hautpoul, an elegy on the death by assassination of the Duc de Berry, the heir apparent to the throne, finally, Soumet, Émile Deschamps, Gaspard de Pons, Mme Desbordes-Valmore, and Alfred de Vigny joined the contributors. Yet in spite of this added assistance Victor Hugo's share was preponderant. It has been calculated that three-quarters of the poems, articles, and narratives came from his pen. There he published additional odes such as "Moïse sur le Nil," which he also submitted to the Academy of Toulouse, winning with it an amarant as well as the privilege of being proclaimed "Maître ès Jeux floraux." There, too, he published "La Vendée," his "Ode sur la mort du duc de Berry," and the first version of his first novel, *Bug Jargal*.

The ode on the death of the Duc de Berry and the ode on

the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux which Hugo composed not long after delighted all the royalists in Paris from the King himself to Chateaubriand. The latter invited the young man to call and unbent sufficiently to praise some passages in "*La Vendée*" and "*La Mort du duc de Berry*," saying:

I have read your verses on *La Vendée* and on *La Mort du duc de Berry*, there are, especially in the latter, things that no poet of this time could have written. My age and my experience unhappily give me the right to be frank and I tell you sincerely that there are passages I like less. But what is beautiful in your odes is very beautiful.

This first interview was followed by another, less formal, at which Hugo met Mme de Chateaubriand and was allowed to buy some chocolate to help out a worthy cause. But the fact that he was recognized by the dean of French letters was really important in his career. It was a conspicuous feather in his cap.

While the significance of all these early compositions should not be exaggerated, they nevertheless reveal more than the intense activity and ambition to which they testify. They disclose important intellectual and aesthetic tendencies: the monarchical and Catholic conservatism of the youthful author, dominated in the matter of political ideas by his opinionated mother; attachment to the older and traditional poetic forms of his native country, although there is a glimmer of independence in the open admission of the influence exerted by the recently published poetry of André Chénier, admiration for the French classical dramatists as compared with foreign authors including Shakespeare; undiminished attraction to the melodramatic, the sensational, the bizarre; and withal a genuine talent ready to burst its bonds and to sweep everything before it. Hugo was already in the eyes of his contemporaries the *enfant sublime* that according to a now-discredited legend Chateaubriand was said to have dubbed him. Alexandre Soumet, the probable creator of the epithet, expressed the same

idea, if in less dramatic form, when he wrote in 1820: "Since we have had your odes, I hear of nothing but your great talent and the prodigious hopes you are raising for our literature." Intoxicating words, indeed, to an ambitious youth at the threshold of his career.

It was in January 1821 that Chateaubriand, the Marquis de Fontanes, Campenon, a member of the French Academy, Bertin de Vaux, the director of the *Journal des débats*, and several others founded the *Société des bonnes lettres*. Its purpose was the propagation of what they chose to call "les saines et bonnes doctrines." To this ultra-royalist group the Hugo brothers were quickly admitted. Abel played an active rôle in the Society's meetings. During the winter and spring of 1821 he gave a series of nine lectures on Spanish literature that seem to have been much appreciated. Victor, too, contributed his share to the Society's activities. During the first year he read "Quiberon," "Vision," and the ode he composed on the occasion of the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux. All were received with gratifying applause. But, as time went on, Victor's appearances at the Society's meetings diminished, not doubtless because of any sudden change in his political views, but rather because of the press of other events and activities.

For this year of 1821 turned out to be an important one in the personal life of the young poet and editor. In June the unexpected death of his mother was a source of genuine and lasting grief. More, it meant a great change in Victor Hugo's personal circumstances. The *Conservateur littéraire* had to be abandoned. It had never been wholly self-supporting. The disclosure of Sophie Hugo's disastrous financial condition indicated that, from any practical point of view, it should never have been launched at all. Lean months followed, for Victor's father was not in sympathy with the notion of a literary career, and the young man tried to make his own living. The poverty of Marius de Pontmercy in *Les Misérables* is a reflection of Hugo's own life in 1821 and 1822.

Life became hard for Marius. It was nothing to eat his clothes and his watch. He ate of that terrible, inexpressible thing that is called *de la vache enragée*, that is to say, he endured great hardships and privations. A terrible thing it is, for it contains days without bread, nights without sleep, evenings without a candle, a hearth without a fire, weeks without work, a future without hope, a coat out at the elbows, an old hat which evokes the laughter of young girls, a door which one finds locked at night because one's rent is not paid, the insolence of the porter and the cook-shop man, the sneers of neighbors, humiliations, dignity trampled on, work of whatever nature accepted, disgust, bitterness, despondency.

Much of that Victor Hugo certainly knew. He lived in an attic in the rue du Dragon where his roommate for a while was a Breton cousin, Adolphe Trébuchet. They had to do most of their own cooking and clean their own quarters. Victor had, like Marius, three shirts, one that he wore, another in his chest of drawers, and a third at the laundry. He had two suits, one of which was fairly presentable. But he managed to acquire a bluebottle coat with gold buttons which he could wear in the evening if invited out. For months he led this grubstreet existence, devoting most of his waking hours to the muse of poetry.

A second result of Mme Hugo's death was that it not only freed her husband who promptly married Catherine Thomas, but it removed the essential obstacle to Victor's courtship of Adèle Foucher. Almost immediately he went to see his sweetheart. On the day following the funeral the Fouchers had held a party at which there was dancing. Adèle was ignorant of Mme Hugo's death, but Victor on walking in front of the house was hurt at what he thought to be crass indifference. The next day he sought out Adèle, determined to have an explanation. Adèle was deeply moved at the news. Victor understood that she had been ignorant, not indifferent. Gustave Simon tells us that "they wept together."

M. Foucher, sympathetic with the young man's grief though he doubtless was, thought it wise to remove Adèle for a time at

least from the immediate vicinity. On July 15 he took his family to Dreux, about sixty miles from Paris, quite a journey for a budding poet who was "hard up." But M. Foucher counted without Victor Hugo's romantic determination. The very next day, July 16, the young man set out on foot for the provinces. On the 19th he reached Dreux. There he wrote to Alfred de Vigny: "I am at Dreux. . . . I did the whole trip on foot under a burning sun, and by roads without the slightest shade. . . . I look pityingly upon all carriages"

He was nevertheless rather the worse for wear, unshaven and covered with dust from head to foot. In this state, he attracted the attention of the police who asked for his passport. Naturally he did not have one, more romantic thoughts having filled his mind as he left Paris. Taken into custody he was fortunately able to establish his identity through a Mme Le Brun, the mother of a Paris friend, and was then released. The next day he met Adèle and her father in the street, but for once his nerve failed. He merely bowed and passed on. Then, returning to his lodgings, he sat down and wrote M. Foucher a letter in which he pretended that the meeting was unexpected but added that frankness compelled him to admit that the sight of Adèle was a keen pleasure. With still greater boldness he wrote that he loved her with all the strength of his soul

M. Foucher was unable to resist this appeal. Victor was allowed to call, and at once he made a formal request for Adèle's hand. Her parents quickly agreed to let him see her under properly chaperoned circumstances; in other words they consented to a kind of unofficial engagement, but they informed him that any definitive engagement must await improvement in his economic situation

Hugo's courtship has been preserved in the *Lettres à la fiancée* published after his death by Paul Meurice. It was a lyrical courtship, ardent, passionate, sincere; naive and romantic, too, in the style of the 1820's. Hugo indulged in all the rhapsodies that young men in love experienced and expressed

at that period. Doubtless young men today are not rational when in love; doubtless they say as Hugo did: "You alone are all my joy, all my happiness, all my life." But a hundred odd years ago the Romantic generation went beyond that. Hugo refused to see in his fiancée the slightest defect or weakness even when she herself acknowledged it. He says, for example.

Great heavens, Adèle! and who am I beside you? oh, I beseech you, and I wish you were present, for I'd kneel before you as a divinity, appreciate yourself better. If you only knew how far above all others of your sex you are, if you could see yourself morally, know as I do all the nobility, all the simplicity, all the greatness of your character, you would not wish me to have . . . any other woman than yourself. It is I who am far from your high position, all my efforts tend to raise myself up to you

One day Adèle admitted that she did not appreciate poetry, but her fiancé simply refused to believe it. Adèle had a beautiful soul, so she must appreciate poetry. It could not be otherwise. This was romanticism, indeed, an ill-fated refusal to face reality.

The letters reveal not only this tremendous romanticism but an extraordinary purity. Victor became angry one day when he noticed people taking a peek at Adèle's shapely ankles as she lifted her skirt in the muddy rue des Saints-Pères and he reproached her for her carelessness!⁴ More than that, he practiced himself the same chastity which he expected of his future wife. He wrote Adèle with a frankness rare for that day that young men should be just as "virgin" as their fiancées. "I believe," he said, "that the most severe modesty is no less an obligatory virtue for men than for women." Like Marius de Pontmercy, young Victor Hugo was "honorable to the point of severity, pure to the point of timidity."

Ten years later Victor Hugo was so moved by rereading the *Lettres à la fiancée* that he wrote in *Les Feuilles d'automne*:

⁴ This episode appeared forty years later in *Les Misérables*

THE CAREER OF VICTOR HUGO

O mes lettres d'amour, de vertu, de jeunesse,
C'est donc vous! Je m'enivre encore à votre ivresse;
Je vous lis à genoux.
Souffrez que pour un jour je reprenne votre âge!
Laissez-moi me cacher, moi l'heureux et le sage,
Pour pleurer avec vous!

And even today, in our materialistic age, the modern reader's irony is tempered by genuine emotion. For if the *Lettres* provoke, on the one hand, a smile; on the other, the sincerity and real exaltation which they reveal are indubitably moving.

This purity in sexual matters derived from an obviously idealistic nature which was also disclosed in a certain degree of religiosity. How devoutly Catholic Hugo was at this time is perhaps a debatable question. A Catholic priest, writing on this problem, considers that the young man's faith was superficial.⁶ But Hugo was certainly not in revolt against the Church. His Voltairian mother appears not to have influenced him in religious matters, however much she affected his political views. Other associations tended to keep him in the fold. His beloved Adèle was a "pratiquante." Partly because of her he frequently went to Saint-Sulpice, where the Foucher family worshiped, to listen to the popular sermons of Abbé Frayssinous. A friend in common, the young Duc de Rohan, who had decided to embrace the religious life, took him one day to see Frayssinous. But the worldliness of this churchman repelled Hugo. Then Rohan took him to meet Abbé Lamennais, that unworldly and stimulating priest who exerted such a strong influence on so many young men of the 1820's. This meeting occurred sometime in 1821 and thirty years later Hugo remembered how impressed he had been. Lamennais was perhaps not wholly orthodox—though he had not yet got into his most serious difficulties with Rome—but he was profoundly idealistic and humanitarian. Hugo's admiration for

⁶ Abbé Dubois, *Les Idées religieuses de Victor Hugo de 1802 à 1825* (Paris, Champion, 1913)

him is a clear indication of his own basic idealism, for the young poet had an essentially religious nature which responded to the nobility of the future author of *Paroles d'un croyant*.

Spurred on by the incentive of love and possible marriage Hugo composed during the spring of 1822 eight new odes of which several were doubtless penned at Gentilly in the delightful valley of the Bièvre where the Foucher family had gone for a vacation and where Victor was invited. These new poems added to those already in existence furnished a respectable collection, and thanks to the assistance of Abel, they were published in June, in the most modest style under the title of *Odes et poésies diverses*.⁶ Victor Hugo's first volume was on the bookstalls of Paris!

Its inspiration was varied. Politics, religion, and love all played their part. But while the lyrical note is undoubtedly present not only in some of the poems but in the preface when he says that poetry is "everything that is intimate in everything," it is clearly subordinated to the political — a tendency which the author takes pains to justify.

There are two purposes in the publication of this book [he wrote], the literary purpose and the political purpose, but in the author's thought, the latter is the consequence of the former, for the history of mankind is a source of poetry only when judged from the elevation of monarchical and religious beliefs.

Whereas Lamartine, who in 1820 had won national fame with his *Méditations poétiques*, had been essentially lyrical, Hugo entered definitely the domain of religious and political ideas. The interest thus displayed is typical and permanent; the particular philosophy expressed is ephemeral. In this first volume Victor Hugo is still intellectually the child of his royalist mother.

Ideas and form, then, correspond to a conservative standard. "La Vendée" expresses not only Hugo's royalist principles but

⁶ There were only three *poésies diverses* "Raymond d'Ascoli," "Idylle," "Les Derniers Bardes."

this dislike of the French Revolution; "Buonaparte," his condemnation of the Corsican usurper, "Le Baptême du duc de Bordeaux," his Catholic faith as well as his attachment to the house of Bourbon. Meter and rhyme are essentially neo-classical, without any of the boldness and color that were to distinguish the poet's later work. M. Berret sees Lamartinian influence in the ode entitled "Vision." It is difficult to agree with that opinion. True, "Vision" was written only a year after Lamartine's *Méditations* were published, but Hugo's ode in spite of its Biblical inspiration, still seems neo-classical in form.

The book could not fail to please the King of France, the aged and ailing Louis XVIII, whose attention had already been drawn to the poet by the ode on the death of the Duc de Berry. Tradition has it that the poor paper and undistinguished cover drew from his Majesty the remark "C'est assez mal fagoté" (It's badly got up), but he at once rewarded the young upholder of his régime with an annuity of 1200 francs. This was not a fortune, but it was adequate for a careful young ménage. It meant that Victor Hugo and Adèle Foucher could bring their dreams to realization. The consent of the General and his new wife had already been obtained. So on October 12, 1822 the marriage was celebrated at the church of Saint-Sulpice. Hugo was escorted to the altar by his old teacher, Biscarrat, and by the brilliant young poet, Alfred de Vigny, now one of Hugo's best friends. The couple went to live with the bride's parents in the rue du Cherche-Midi. Their happiness would have been unbounded save for a tragic event: the madness of Victor's brother Eugène. For two years or more he had been acting strangely. Victor's marriage threw him into an attack of insanity which, a few months later, led to his internment in the great asylum of Charenton. Whether Eugène's insanity was precipitated by his own love for Adèle Foucher is something that remains obscure; most students of Victor Hugo's career tend to that view. In any case it furnished for Victor Hugo a painful counterweight to his supreme moment of happiness.

Such grim antitheses were destined to pursue him throughout his long career. His personal and literary triumphs were rarely unaccompanied by rebuffs, disasters, or tragedies, sometimes greater than mortal man could seem to bear. It is unlikely, however, that any such presentiments of future tribulations disturbed him. He was married at last to his "Adèle adorée"; he was launched on a promising literary career, he had been recognized by men of letters and by the monarch of France. Adolescence was behind him. Manhood with all its responsibilities, its trials, its possible achievements, was now his. He was within four months of being twenty-one years old.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY APPRENTICE

J'aime à voir sur tes flancs, Colonne étincelante,
Revivre ces soldats qu'en leur onde sanglante
Ont roulés le Danube, et le Rhin et le Pô!

— V. H.

VICTOR HUGO, said one of his contemporaries, was like "an archangel from a stained-glass window." In this exuberant expression we find a clear indication of the poet's physical attraction. Lamartine was perhaps a more imposing figure because of his height, Vigny, a more obviously aristocratic one. But Hugo's person and personality were extremely engaging as all contemporary portraits and testimony reveal. He was, doubtless, a trifle short in stature, but his features more than made up for that deficiency. An oval, well-balanced face, with a straight, firm nose, a medium-sized, graceful mouth, a notably high forehead crowned by thick brown hair, gray-blue eyes, deeply set, and flashing with intensity; such were the features that so impressed all men and women who came into his presence.

This physical beauty was accompanied by a dignity extraordinary in one of his years. He tended to be grave, serious, courteous, and austere. Friends and acquaintances all bear witness to his ardor, his purity, his uprightness, his elevated sentiments. Lacking, perhaps, the keenest sense of humor or a rapier wit — though he was by no means devoid of gaiety and was reputed an excellent conversationalist — he possessed just those moral qualities which lent him prestige and authority. Furthermore, during these years following his marriage, he was a conspicuously happy man. Much has been written concerning the melancholy romantic. The epithet cannot be applied to

Victor Hugo during the 1820's. A contented husband, a delighted father, an increasingly successful writer, Victor Hugo differed markedly from many of his rivals who celebrated in verse or prose their sorrow, their grief, their despair.

Not that fortune was entirely friendly. Hugo's first child, Leopold, born July 16, 1823 and named for his grandfather, died at Blois in October, a victim of improper feeding. As Adèle seemed unable to nurse her son the young couple had confided the infant to a wet nurse recommended by General Hugo and his wife. The woman turned out to be incompetent and negligent. In spite of the care given the child by Victor's stepmother, the baby died. It was another of those blows of fate which tempered the poet's happiness. Other children, however, were not long in coming. Léopoldine was born on the 28th of August 1824, and three other children arrived at approximately two-year intervals.¹ Before he was thirty years old, Victor Hugo found himself the father of four lively youngsters who helped reconcile him to the loss of his first-born son.

In the meantime he was advancing steadily and surely to the leadership of the Romantic school. The year 1823 saw the publication of his second novel, *Han d'Islande*. It was by no means a brilliant or even satisfactory book as Hugo confessed in later years. "There is in *Han d'Islande*," he wrote in 1837, "only one genuine sentiment, a young man's love, only one genuine observation, a young girl's love. All the rest is divined, that is, invented." The love in question is Hugo's love for Adèle Foucher. The novel was written during their courtship, and Hugo in good romantic fashion was translating their own emotions. Apart from that we have a tale of extraordinary and fearful adventures in the manner and tradition of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and Lewis' *Monk*, and it won the warm approval of the chief French advocate of that style of writing, Charles Nodier, with whom Hugo at once made acquaintance.

¹ Charles Hugo, born November 9, 1826, François-Victor, October 21, 1828, Adèle, July 28, 1830

Nodier had already written a fantastic story entitled *Smarra ou les Démones de la nuit* (1821) which Hugo had probably read and from which he may have got a few details for his *Han d'Islande*. This tale of terror depicts a terrifying monster, Hans, who kills his victims with a stone ax and drinks their blood from a human skull. But in spite of all the horrors piled up in the narrative, a happy ending unites the two lovers, Ordener and Ethel, punishes the villains, and properly rewards the virtuous. Far more important in Hugo's development than this literary monstrosity were his contributions to the *Muse française*.

Émile Deschamps says in a note written during his last years that the "*Muse française* had as founders: A. Soumet, A. Guiraud, those two poets of transition between classicism and romanticism, then Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Saint-Valry, Desjardins, a great and original critic, . . . and Émile Deschamps." Other collaborators soon included Charles Nodier, Baour-Lormian, Ancelot, Gasper de Pons, Delphine Gay, and Mme Desbordes-Valmore. It was a heterogeneous group, without any definite program or clear-cut literary principles. In 1823 most writers were still groping. Nevertheless, the *Muse française*, though it lived but a year, was an important event in the literary history of the period, and in the case of Victor Hugo it offers more valuable evidence than many critics have realized. There, for example, we find the ode "A mon père," which contains one of the earliest indications of Hugo's evolution concerning Napoleon, for if he still dubs him a tyrant, he is conscious of Napoleon's glory and of the extraordinary deeds of French arms under his leadership. Again, in the *Muse française*, the critic may read Victor Hugo's article on *Quentin Durward* where the young man declares that the poet or novelist should not remain aloof from the problems of society and the state. "Who then," he asks, "will show devotion if it be not the poet? What voice will arise in the storm save that of the lyre which can calm it?" The theory of the social mission

of the artist is already here in germ. And even more clearly forecast is Hugo's theory of the union of the sublime and the grotesque, for Hugo declares in praising Scott that life is a bizarre drama "in which the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the high and the low are mingled." The novelist, he adds, should make his work as lifelike as possible. The *Muse française* reveals these things and it also teaches us that if Hugo was not yet definitely romantic, he had at least broken with the immediate past and was looking toward the future. For in an article on Byron, published in June 1824, Hugo wrote:

In vain does a small number of small minds seek to lead the general ideas (of our time) back to the disheartening literary system of the last century . . . the real literature of our age . . . draws its poetry from the springs of truth, . . . it is, in a word, what the common thought of a great nation should be after great calamities sad, proud, and religious

Hugo's position is still obviously vague and that vagueness is maintained in the next edition of his poetry, published under the title of *Nouvelles odes*, which marks no sensational advance toward romanticism. Political inspiration is still evident in "La Mort de Mlle de Sombreuil" and "La Guerre d'Espagne"; the personal note is reinforced by the ode "Mon enfance" from which we quoted in the first chapter. But in the preface he maintains that he does not know what constitutes the *genre classique* or the *genre romantique*, and he qualifies the quarrel between classicists and romanticists as frivolous. Nevertheless, he continues to assert, in conformity with the principles set forth in the *Muse française*, that the

poet must walk before the people like a light and must show them the way. He must lead them back to all the great principles of order, morality, and honor, and in order that his power may be agreeable to them, all the fibers of the human heart must vibrate under his fingers like the strings of a lyre.

The appeal to the heart rather than to the head is implicit in these lines.

In June, the Hugos were able to set up an establishment of their own. Victor had received an additional annuity from the King. So they chose a small apartment at number 90 in the rue de Vaugirard where they were to live for the next three years. From there they moved in April 1827 to number 11 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, destined to become an important center in the history of French romanticism.

Meanwhile Louis XVIII died (on September 16, 1824) and was succeeded by Charles X, that ultra-reactionary king whose incredibly inept reign Balzac admired so much. Louis XVIII had been relatively liberal. The assassination of the Duc de Berry had, however, discredited his liberal ministry headed by Decazes. The last four years of Louis' reign saw the Ultras already ensconced in power, first under Richelieu and then under de Villèle. The reaction continued with increased momentum under the new king who surrounded himself with Jesuit and Ultramontane sympathizers. A very brief liberal interlude occurred in 1829 under Martignac. But when Charles dissolved parliament only to have the elections return a much larger opposition, a crisis was precipitated. Polignac, ultra-reactionary, became Prime Minister. The famous, or rather, infamous ordonnances abridging liberties guaranteed by the Charter were promulgated and, as a consequence, the Revolution of July was unleashed.

A shrewd political observer might have forecast the trend of events. But it is too much to expect that Victor Hugo, at the age of twenty-two, still strongly royalist, still a member of the *Société des bonnes lettres*, still much under the spell of his mother's influence, could have foreseen the dénouement of the new régime, especially a régime which now awarded him the cross of the Legion of Honor and further flattered him with one of the coveted invitations to the coronation of the new king. Accompanied by Charles Nodier, Hugo made the journey

to Rheims where he found Chateaubriand and Lamartine who naturally had also been invited. There in the great cathedral he witnessed the medieval ceremony, either failed to observe or remained unshocked by the revival of the divine right theory, and dutifully composed a wholly uninspired ode, *Le Sacre de Charles X*, published at once by the Royal Press on direct orders from the king

This journey to Rheims was but one of several made by Hugo in the year 1825. Before attending the coronation he and Adèle had taken Léopoldine on a visit to the General at Blois, where the *rapprochement* between father and son begun in Paris after Victor's marriage was effectively completed. After the coronation Hugo and Nodier accepted an invitation from Lamartine to visit his ancestral home at Saint-Point. The visit was brief, indeed, because of the indisposition of Mme Nodier; it became rather the first stage in a more extensive journey to Switzerland made by the Nodier and Hugo families, the record of which has been preserved in *Victor Hugo raconté*. The Alps were a spectacle that harmonized perfectly with Hugo's constant taste for the grandiose whether it be in nature or in art. The reflection of Mont-Blanc in the Lac Vert, for example, recalled to the poet's mind some of the great creations of Shakespeare where, as he put it, "a great and sombre figure . . . is reflected in a limpid, transparent, and pure soul, works as complete as nature, in which there is always an Ophelia for Hamlet, a Desdemona for Othello, a Lac Vert for Mont-Blanc." This vision of the Alps which so enchanted Hugo lay long in his memory and provided inspiration for some of his later poetic work.

The intimate association with Charles Nodier on these journeys doubtless brought the two men even closer together than collaboration on the *Muse française* and meetings at the Arsenal had done. Nodier was in charge of the library of the Arsenal, and beginning in April 1824 he regularly received in his quarters the young poets and artists of the period. Lamartine,

Vigny, Hugo, Soumet, Delphine Gay, and the Deveria brothers were all habitués of this early Cénacle. Nodier was older than the others and, as we have seen, had already established important literary examples. His great interest in Shakespeare may not have been the very first influence which led Hugo to the English author, but it certainly contributed to that effect. Without exaggeration one can affirm that the rôle played by Nodier in the development of Hugo's early writings and early literary principles is by no means negligible. The two men were clearly kindred spirits.

The year 1826 brought to Hugo—in addition to another baby—two publications, the revised *Bug Jargal* and the *Odes et ballades*. The original text narrating the revolt of the blacks in San Domingo had been devoid of any love interest. For this new version Hugo not only created a heroine but, as might be expected from a man already fond of violent contrast, had the leader of the blacks, Bug Jargal, fall hopelessly but devotedly in love with her. This romantic antithesis was supported by the more conventional love between Marie and the young Frenchman Léopold d'Auverney, a love threatened and almost frustrated by the insurrection. If Léopold and Marie are united at the end, it is due to the unselfish and courageous devotion of Bug Jargal. The narrative is surrounded, moreover, by an abundance of local color. In its final form, therefore, it is as mad a tale of exotic adventure as *Han d'Islande*. Today, its chief interest is that we find there certain elements which Hugo was to use more skillfully in later works. There are not only the antitheses already mentioned, but also the motive of honor, a central theme in *Hernani*. Melodrama, such as the death of the hideous buffoon, Habibrah, by falling into an abyss after a vain though nearly successful effort to drag d'Auverney with him, will reappear (with necessary modifications, of course) in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. At the same time the characters of the novel reflect to some extent the influence of Nodier's *Jean Sbo-gar* and possibly his *Smarra ou les Démones de la nuit*.

The *Ballades* of 1826 also exploit the fantastic, the strange, the terrifying. The *genre* had swept over western Europe during the immediately preceding decades, and Hugo was clearly profiting from a widespread vogue. He was doubtless also influenced by certain specific writers. He was, perhaps, following the advice of Mme de Stael, who had urged her countrymen to follow in the footsteps of the Germans and had analyzed the ballads of Burger, Wieland, and Goethe. Victor's brother, Abel, had long been interested in the Spanish ballads, and had published in 1822 a volume of *Romances historiques traduites de l'espagnol*. As for English ballads they, too, were available in translation. Loève-Veimars had just published in 1825 a collection of *Ballades, légendes et chants populaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Écosse par W. Scott, Th. Moore, Campbell et les anciens poètes*. There were, also, some French ballads of this type: those of Millevoye and of Charles Nodier. Hugo took, therefore, as his models not the old French ballads of Villon and Charles d'Orléans, with a fixed rhyme-scheme and stanza structure, but the freer, looser ballad of France, Scotland, Germany, and Spain.

These facts alone suggest accelerated drift on Hugo's part toward romanticism. Any remaining doubts are dispelled by the poems themselves and by the preface which introduced the new edition. In the latter Hugo made his now famous comparison between the royal park of Versailles, "well leveled, well pruned, well cleaned, well raked, well sanded," and a primitive forest of the New World "with its giant trees, its tall grass, its deep vegetation, its thousand multi-colored birds . . . its great rivers bearing islands of flowers downstream, its immense waterfalls with their overhanging rainbows."² The former, he maintains, has upset or destroyed the natural order of things. But in the primeval forest, on the contrary, "everything obeys an invariable law." The Versailles garden is symbolic of "artificial literature", the primeval forest symbolic of "natural

² Cf. Chateaubriand's *Atala*, in particular, the prologue and epilogue.

poetry." The general principle which Hugo expresses is, therefore, that "the poet should have only one model, nature; only one guide, truth." He should not find his inspiration in books but in his soul and his heart. Only two books, concludes this disciple of Chateaubriand, are worthy of the poet's study, Homer and the Bible.

The ballads in the 1826 edition numbered ten and included the well-known titles "A Trilby," "La Fiancée du timbalier," "Les Deux Archers," "La Ronde du sabbat," and "La Fée et la pèri." Most of them are reminiscent of Charles Nodier's work, though in one or two the influence of Burger or Goethe is important.^a For the definitive edition of 1828 Hugo was to compose five new ballads, two of which are particularly famous, "Le Pas d'armes du roi Jean," which M. Berret has well described as resembling a fifteenth-century woodcut, and "La Légende de la nonne," drawn in large part from the legend of the bleeding nun in Lewis' *Monk*. All are clearly what Hugo himself proclaimed them to be: "sketches of capricious type: pictures, dreams, scenes, narratives, superstitious legends, popular traditions." But they all reveal a brilliancy of art, a virtuosity of technique, a wealth of imagination which increased Hugo's reputation in the eyes of his contemporaries. In the mere matter of versification there is already considerable variety. For Hugo not only uses the conventional alexandrine with skill (as in "Les Deux Archers"), but the octosyllabic line ("La Fiancée du timbalier") and in "A Trilby" the seven-syllable line which goes back to the Renaissance but which had been little used in recent times. The ballads may not be profound; indeed, they are lacking in any philosophical content or significance. But they are indubitably clever and brilliant. They are, in short, excellent examples of the colorful side of romanticism. A young critic of *Le Globe* by the name of Sainte-Beuve was one of the first to proclaim their excellence. He saw,

^a See H. F. Bauer, *Les Ballades de Victor Hugo* (Paris, Champion, 1936), also N. H. Clement, *Romanticism in France* (N. Y., 1939), pp. 108-128.

to be sure, the limitations and the dangers of the *genre*; he warned the poet against errors of bad taste resulting from the very excess of his imagination, but he gave high praise to "La Fée et la pèri" as well as to "A Trilby," "a little masterpiece of grace and charm"; of the "Ronde du sabbat" he wrote that "never was a satanic orgy conceived or rendered with more verve." His final judgment was that Hugo's talent was unquestionably superior, with very little needed to keep it always on a high level.

The young critic's articles had been published anonymously. According to Sainte-Beuve, whose account seems in this case more reliable than Victor Hugo's, they made such an impression on the poet that he sought at once the writer's identity. The critic turned out to be none other than a neighbor of his, a young man from Boulogne who had come to Paris to complete his education. After finishing the lycée he had studied medicine for a while, but had given that up. Since 1824 he had been connected with *Le Globe*. He lived at number 94 in the rue de Vaugirard. Hugo lost no time in calling on Sainte-Beuve, but, as the latter was away at the time, the first meeting really occurred at Hugo's house. The two men quickly discovered that they had much in common, youth, first of all, for they were less than three years apart; an ardent interest in literature above everything. Sainte-Beuve was then working on his *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au 16e siècle*. One can imagine the conversation that ensued, the poetic principles that were discussed. It was the beginning of an important, dramatic, and short-lived friendship. Sainte-Beuve became an intimate of the Hugo household. More, he quickly replaced Nodier as the most effective literary confidant of Victor Hugo, and this is of great importance, for while Nodier had tended to turn Hugo's attention toward foreign literatures, Sainte-Beuve led Hugo back to the French Renaissance. Although the young critic had been impressed by Amédée Pichot's *Voyage historique et lit-*

téraire en Angleterre et en Écosse (1825)⁴ which gave him an inkling of the work and literary principles of the English Lake Poets, he nonetheless helped Hugo to a far greater appreciation of the poetic techniques of Ronard and his confreres of the *Pléiade* than the author of the *Odes et ballades* would otherwise have enjoyed. A little later, Sainte-Beuve's interest in the Lake Poets — reawakened and reinforced by his trip to England in the later summer of 1828⁵ — was imparted in some measure to his talented friend. Meanwhile he bridged the gap between the Romantic poets of 1827 and the Renaissance poets of 1550.

Sainte-Beuve thus became one of the central figures in the Romantic Cénacle which in October succeeded the group that used to assemble at the Arsenal under Nodier's aegis. This new and greater Cénacle, which included not only the poets but the sculptor David d'Angers, the painter Louis Boulanger, the Deveria brothers, and the great Delacroix, came to be known as the Cénacle de Joseph Delorme, from the title of Sainte-Beuve's first volume of poetry published under that pseudonym. It met more often than not at Hugo's quarters at number 11 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs to which, it will be remembered, Hugo moved in this year of 1827. Sainte-Beuve also moved. He and his mother took up residence at number 19 in the same street just a few steps from the Hugos'. The new friendship was off to an auspicious, if impetuous, start.

The year 1827 is, then, a critical one in Hugo's development. But not only because of the contact with Sainte-Beuve and the formation of the great Cénacle. At least two other events are important milestones: the composition of the "Ode à la colonne de la place Vendôme" and the publication in December of *Cromwell* with its famous preface. The ode was inspired by an episode at the Austrian embassy early in February. Three of Napoleon's marshals to whom he had given ducal rank were

⁴ Sainte-Beuve reviewed this book in *Le Globe*.

⁵ See L. Séché, *Sainte-Beuve*, I, 96.

among the guests at the embassy ball. On their arrival the servant charged with the task of announcing them ignored their noble titles and announced them simply as Marshal Macdonald, Marshal Soult, and Marshal Mortier. As the *Victor Hugo raconté* puts it: "Austria, humiliated by titles which recalled her defeats, publicly repudiated them." The three dukes, insulted, immediately left the embassy. Just as in this country Oliver Wendell Holmes was later to be inspired by a newspaper announcement to compose "Old Ironsides," so Victor Hugo was inspired by the report of this event to compose his "Ode à la colonne de la place Vendôme." It was at once published in the *Journal des débats* and produced a profound impression in Paris. Its ringing lines (three of which appear at the head of this chapter) won the general public much as Holmes's on this side of the ocean were to do. What is more, the opposition press — the liberal press — became more favorable to Hugo. The poem marks a step by the poet away from conservative Bourbonism and a clear advance toward a more liberal position. For any step away from Bourbonism led to liberalism even though it meant a *rapprochement* with a régime which to-day seems hardly synonymous with freedom. And if we interpret the episode in more personal terms, we may say that Victor Hugo's father was at last beginning to be triumphant over his royalist mother.

As for the *Préface de Cromwell*, its publication was, oddly enough, an event of first importance in the history of French romanticism. The play itself was too long to be staged, and the preface contained little or nothing that could be considered startlingly new. Yet the preface was looked on as a leading manifesto of the new school, and it enthroned Victor Hugo as its uncontested leader.

The explanation of this phenomenon lies partly in the fact that controversy had been raging for several years. At the threshold of the century Mme de Stael had already suggested that the French classical theater, however admirable, could no

longer satisfy the new generations nourished on the Revolution and its aftermath. In 1810 her *De l'Allemagne* continued the attack on the classical tradition. It was followed in 1813 by the publication of Schlegel's *Cours de littérature dramatique*. While Mme de Staël was prudently respectful of classicism in the midst of her revolutionary suggestions, the German critic was openly hostile to the conventional rules and formulas which in his view limited the genius of Corneille and Racine. Then, after a brief lull, controversy broke out again in the twenties. Manzoni's *Lettre sur les unités* was published in France at the beginning of the new decade. Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* raised fundamental questions in 1823 and again in 1825. In 1827, the very year when Hugo was composing his preface and finishing his play, a company of English actors, including the celebrated Charles Kemble and Miss Smithson, came to the French capital and offered *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* in English to the literary élite of Paris. Five years before, a premature attempt by an English company to produce Shakespeare in Paris had failed. Now in 1827 the situation was more favorable, and the company more talented. Although few of the Parisian audiences knew English—Hugo himself could not even read it—the performances were well attended and enjoyed great success. Indeed, the Cénacle was enchanted. "These admirable dramas admirably played," he stated in later years, "stirred M Victor Hugo profoundly." Alexandre Dumas has testified to his own enthusiasm in a little essay entitled *Comment je devins auteur dramatique*. He attributes to Shakespeare a creative gift inferior only to that of the Almighty. This extraordinary success of the English players is added proof that innovation and revolt were in the air. On the other hand, the supporters of classicism were still vocal. In 1824, for example, there had been a sensational meeting of the French Institute at which a member of the Academy by the name of Auger had launched a bitter attack against the new school. And the following year Baour-Lormian had published his now forgotten satires.

In these circumstances and against this background Victor Hugo launched his resounding preface. It began with a highly simplified summary of the history of poetry. Hugo distinguished three different ages with a characteristic type of poetry for each. Primitive times, he says, were essentially lyrical; they produced the Ode (of which the best example is the *Book of Genesis*). The period of classical antiquity was epic, and Homer remains its best representative. The modern era dates from the establishment of Christianity. It has produced the Drama, and the greatest creator of drama is Shakespeare. This introduction is followed by the enunciation of certain principles. Christianity has revealed the double nature of man. Modern poetry will, therefore, realize that "everything in creation is not humanly beautiful, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the shapeless beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse side of the sublime, evil with good, shadow with light." It will reflect this duality and mingle in one whole these contradictory but not incompatible elements. This theory of the union of the grotesque and the sublime is the most important idea of Hugo's preface. It is certainly the most celebrated. As Hugo defines it, the grotesque is more than the comic. It is also the ugly and the repulsive. It differs from the fantastic in that it is natural, rather than supernatural, real rather than artificial. It is in nature, a part of divine creation. To bolster his theory and give it authority Hugo invoked the name of Shakespeare, for while the English dramatist did not use the grotesque in the Hugolian sense, he did mingle antithetical elements in his work. He introduced, for example, comic elements and characters into his gravest tragedies. And the implication in Hugo's text is clear. French dramatists should follow that example.

The preface makes a vigorous attack on the three unities so faithfully observed by the French classical writers. The unities of time and place had been advocated in the seventeenth century as a means of creating greater verisimilitude. That is,

indeed, strange, declares Hugo, for the real is precisely what kills them. What is more improbable and absurd than the vestibule or antechamber in which classical tragedies take place? What cannot be enacted there occurs off stage. The result is that "instead of scenes, we have narrations; instead of pictures, descriptions" And he adds: "We are beginning to understand today that the exact locality is one of the first elements of reality," and that "every action has its own duration in time just as it has its own particular locality" As for the classical unity of action, Hugo claims to respect it. In reality he redefines it as the "unité d'ensemble" which is not the same thing as the unity of action practiced by Jean Racine

While Hugo thus attacks two of the classical unities, he does not suggest the overthrow of tragedy written in verse. Far from advocating the use of prose, he maintains, even as the seventeenth century had, that the poetic form is desirable. But he calls for a freer, more supple verse no longer made rigid by the iron-clad rules of Boileau, "a verse that is free, frank, loyal, daring to say anything without prudery, to express everything without artificiality," capable of putting the caesura elsewhere than always and inevitably after the sixth syllable, and more hospitable to *enjambement* than to inversion, but still faithful to rhyme, "that supreme grace of our poetry." Verse, conceived in this fashion, will impart genuine literary distinction to a drama.

In general, Hugo declares himself in favor of greater liberty. The only rules are the "general laws of nature" Imitation of nature is, therefore, the essential goal Of course he recognizes that art and nature are not exactly the same thing: "The truth of art cannot be . . . *absolute* reality." Dramatic art cannot hold up to nature an ordinary mirror which "would merely reflect a dull, smooth surface, faithful but colorless" It must be a "mirror of concentration, which, far from weakening them, will pick up and condense the coloring rays, which will turn a glimmer into a light, a light into a flame." Art, therefore, im-

plies a choice, but it implies a free choice and a vast goal. "All that is in nature belongs to art" (*Tout ce qui est dans la nature est dans l'art*). The dramatic poet, inspired by this conception, must devote himself to the task of disclosing a double horizon: he must "illuminate both the external and the internal nature of man"; he must "mingle in the same picture the drama of life and the drama of conscience." Viewed in this light, the purpose of art is "almost divine."

This brief analysis, which by no means includes all the ideas contained in the preface, perhaps suggests the reason for its success. Hugo set down in compact form notions which had been floating more or less vaguely in the air. He managed to clothe them with an appearance of historical and philosophical significance. The ideas might not be brand-new, but they were opportunely and eloquently expressed. The timeliness and the stylistic brilliance of the document account in large part for its success. Even a classicist like Nisard had to admit the superiority of Hugo's style. And if classicists made that admission, however much they might dispute the validity of Hugo's ideas, one can imagine the chorus of praise which arose from romantic lips. David d'Angers exclaimed with fervor: "What depth of thought! This preface alone is a code of literature." George Sand wrote Hugo that his preface was the "*mot d'ordre*" of the dramatic revolution. That was the almost unanimous opinion of the great Cénacle.

Cromwell, the play, makes a conscientious attempt to put some of these principles into effect. It is written in that liberated verse advocated by the author; it presents both buffoons and important personages, it is replete with local color. In the poet's own words, he proposed to "depict the giant Cromwell from every angle and in every aspect" and to surround that portrait with a "vast scene of history." This double aim of creating an "accurate and conscientious picture of Cromwell and his time" leaves little room for plot which, as the reader quickly observes, is not highly developed. We discover that there is

a double conspiracy against Cromwell. Some Cavaliers and Puritans have joined hands, from totally different motives, against the Protector. But while the Cavaliers intend to seize Cromwell's person by means of a narcotic which Lord Rochester is to pour into his wine, the Puritans hope to stab to death this man who, they fear, seeks to make himself king. In the end not only do the conspiracies fail, but Cromwell surprises the conspirators by granting them clemency.

Hugo proudly listed a large number of books as proof of his careful documentation. In reality, most of the details came from two sources. Villemain's *Histoire de Cromwell* (Paris, 1829, 2 vols.) and the *Mémoires* of the Guizot collection. Yet however careful the documentation may have been, there can be no doubt that Hugo was unable to give a just picture of the English Puritans. Tending to lend excessive weight to external or trivial details, he fails completely to show their indubitable sincerity and devotion.⁶ Furthermore, his portrait of Cromwell offers some disconcerting resemblances to Napoleon. Hugo had read the "Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène" (published in 1823) and been obviously impressed by it.⁷ His "Ode à la colonne de la place Vendôme" was a pronounced step, as we have seen, toward Bonapartism. It is scarcely surprising that in this same year a few Napoleonic details should slip into his characterization of the English despot, but the portrait is not improved thereby.

The principal merit of the play lies in certain admirably poetic passages. Milton's speech to Cromwell in the fourth scene of the third act is a superbly eloquent protest against the dictator's ambition. The nocturnal interview between Cromwell and the astrologer Manassé at the end of the third act has often been praised. Of this scene Émile Deschamps said in 1828: "Terror and poetry are carried to the highest degree

⁶ For a good study of Hugo's use of sources see J. H. Thomas, *L'Angleterre dans l'œuvre de V. Hugo* (Paris, 1933).

⁷ L. A. Rozelaar, "Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène et V. Hugo en 1827," *French Quarterly* (March 1927).

that art can attain”⁸ Cromwell’s monologue (Act IV, sc. 2) comparing his lot with that of his buffoons and also parts of his long speech (Act V, sc. 12) in which he publicly repudiates the charge that he seeks a crown were also immediately recognized as splendid compositions. The former was considered by the *Figaro*’s critic to be “worthy of being placed on a level with the most beautiful inspirations of Shakespeare,” and he praised the latter as being “imprinted with a very remarkable historical color.”

Yet *Cromwell*, the play, remains in spite of all that can be said in its behalf far less important than the preface, which may well be judged, in Professor Souriau’s phrase, Hugo’s “master-piece as a literary apprentice” (son chef-d’œuvre d’apprenti). With it a long period of preparation came to an end. Hugo has now tried his hand at poetry, the novel, drama, and literary criticism. As a poet and literary critic he has already achieved eminence. His novels brought him perhaps more notoriety than solid fame, but were at least a training in the art of prose narrative. As a dramatist he remained still unknown. *Cromwell* was obviously unplayable, but it nevertheless taught him something of dramatic structure. All this will soon bear fruit. The next three or four years witness an abundant, dazzling output of poems, plays, novels which will establish beyond all doubt Victor Hugo’s position as one of the great literary geniuses of the age.

⁸ Thomas, *op cit*, p. 49

CHAPTER III

ROMANTIC VICTORY

Quel temps merveilleux! Walter Scott était alors dans toute sa fleur de succès, on s'initiait aux mystères du *Faust* de Goethe . . . On découvrait Shakespeare . . . et les poèmes de lord Byron, le *Corsaire*, *Lara*, le *Giaour*, *Manfred*, *Beppo*, *Don Juan* nous arrivaient de l'Orient, qui n'était pas banal encore

— TH. GAUTIER

THE great Cénacle was more than a "mutual admiration society"; it played a genuine rôle in the development of Romanticism. The group met at the home of Hugo or sometimes of Vigny. Several of the major Romantic compositions were first read, applauded, and discussed in Hugo's salon at number 11 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. That salon was called impressively the "room of the golden lily," because the prize awarded Hugo some years before by the Academy of Toulouse, a large golden lily, was exhibited there. The room was decorated, says M. Séché, the historian of the Cénacle, by a "beautiful canvas by Caravage, several pictures by Deveria, and Boulanger's *Ronde du sabbat*."¹ This *Ronde du sabbat* was obviously suggested by one of Hugo's ballads. Louis Boulanger, Hugo's closest friend next to Sainte-Beuve, illustrated a number of the poet's volumes and painted a number of pictures inspired by Hugo's written work. In such surroundings as this salon, Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Vigny, Lamartine, and even Musset, infant that he was, read poems or plays. Those evenings allowed the young

¹ L. Séché, *Le Cénacle de Joseph Delorme*, I, 72

poets and artists to keep up with each other's projects, activities, and accomplishments. Above all, it gave them a chance to discuss principles and methods, and to present a united front to the adherents of classicism.

But the Cénacle had its lighter side as well. The group frequently went to eat "galettes" at the *Moulin de beurre* in the southern outskirts of Paris and afterwards settled down for an evening's conversation in one of the innumerable *guinguettes* of that section of the city. One day Abel Hugo discovered a little restaurant run by la mère Saguet. For an incredibly modest price one could get a couple of eggs "sur le plat" or an omelet, a fricasseed chicken, admirably cooked, bread and cheese, and white wine "à discrétion." Mother Saguet's establishment became at once a favorite rendezvous for the Cénacle. That did not prevent them, when the weather was good, from walking out to view the sunset over the plain of Vaugirard or over the Seine from the towers of Notre-Dame.

While literary activities were Hugo's main preoccupation during the next few years, personal events cannot be wholly ignored. Early in 1828 the poet was profoundly grief-stricken by the death of his father. He had come to be both proud and fond of the General, an attitude which he did not consider disloyal to the memory of his royalist mother. On the evening of January 28 he had called with Adèle on his father and step-mother. The General had seemed both animated and gay. The young couple stayed until eleven o'clock. They had scarcely arrived home when news came of the General's sudden death. A stroke of apoplexy had carried him off in a few minutes. Once again a literary triumph (that of the *Préface de Cromwell*) was offset by a blow from fate.

The furor caused by the famous preface gradually died down, and the year 1828 witnessed but two events of literary significance or interest, the publication of the final and definitive edition of the *Odes et ballades*, and the performance of *Amy Robsart*. On the former it is unnecessary to linger, the

poems now added to the collection in no way altered the characteristics which we have already seen that it possessed. But a great deal of superfluous ink has been spilt concerning *Amy Robsart*. The episode, as M. André Pavie and Professor Ascoli have pretty clearly proved, amounts simply to this, that Victor Hugo gave the manuscript of this somber prose-drama, drawn from Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*, to his brother-in-law, Paul Foucher. *Amy Robsart* was then produced under the younger man's name at the Odéon. Far from meeting with success, the play was violently attacked. Victor Hugo at once rushed into print and claimed the authorship of the least successful sections. By so doing he left Paul Foucher still free for a fresh literary début.

The year 1828 was, then, relatively unimportant as far as actual publications were concerned. But it was succeeded by a year of great significance in Hugo's literary life. It opened with that dazzlingly brilliant collection of poems entitled *Les Orientales*. A captious critic might maintain that these poems merely continued in the path of the *Odes et ballades*, for many showed the same preoccupation and the same technique. But this new volume shines with a greater luster, and certainly displays a wider scope of interest. For the Orient which Hugo evokes is not limited to Araby or Cathay. As a matter of fact, the Far East is excluded from the collection, and Hugo composes his Orient from lands much nearer home. Greece, on the one hand, the Mohammedan areas of the Mediterranean, on the other, are his principal sources of inspiration. What is more, except for the journey to Spain in his childhood, Hugo had seen nothing of what he wrote. His Orient is largely fashioned from his reading and his imagination. He read, for example, Fauriel's *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (1824-25) as well as a good many translations of Arabian songs furnished him by another orientalist, Ernest Fouinet. He absorbed Chateaubriand's *Martyrs* and *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, the poems of Byron, the *Divan* of Goethe. He

utilized once more the *Romancero* which his brother Abel had published. He was familiar with the poems of his confreres, Vigny and Lamartine. The former had published *Heléna* in 1822; the latter, the *Dernier chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* in 1825.

The Greek war of independence had aroused the sympathy of the young romanticists. Byron's death at Missolonghi in 1824 had been a source of grief and inspiration to all of them. Hugo expressed a universal feeling when he wrote in the *Muse française* that Byron's death seemed to the French like a "domestic calamity." But at that time Hugo was still strongly royalist and remained silent on the issue of the war. After his shift of position in 1827 the Greek revolt could inspire his muse. He could now follow in the footsteps of Lamartine and Delacroix. And he did not fail to do so.

The *Orientales* are not, therefore, quite the "useless book of pure poetry" which Hugo claimed them to be in his preface. Poems like "Clair de lune," "Navarin," and "L'Enfant" inevitably arouse the reader's indignation or admiration in behalf of the embattled Greeks. A poem like "Lui," devoted to Napoleon's grandiose career, shows that political ideas still concerned the author. Nevertheless, the majority of these compositions are magnificent pictures and little more, a triumph of plastic art and musical effect. "Le Feu du ciel," for example, which opens the collection, is a brilliant and epic vision of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, "Grenade," a colorful evocation of Moorish Spain; "Mazeppa" (inspired in part by Byron's poem), a dashing, imaginative account of the wild ride of that Russian hetman, "Les Djinns" (the most famous poem of the collection) a veritable *tour de force* of poetic skill and technique. No poem illustrates better than the last the break with classical tradition. The subject is both exotic and irrational. The continual change of poetic line — mounting from the two-syllable line to the decasyllable, then descending again to the two-syllable line — by which Hugo sought to imitate the

crescendo and the *diminuendo* of the spirits' flight was a violation of classical tenets of poetic form. The atmosphere of mystery and terror which he so successfully created was the antithesis of the older French rationalism in literature. Subject and form, then, break definitely with the past. But the poem won the admiration not only of Hugo's contemporaries, but of posterity. Swinburne in later years maintained that not even Shelley "has left a more exquisite piece or one more filled with delicate lyricism."

The *Orientales* mark an important advance in Hugo's poetic language. The epithets, personifications, circumlocutions, and metaphors of his *Odes* had been strongly neo-classical. Such expressions as "cieux propices," "nuits profondes," "sphères célestes," "monarque en cheveux blancs" (for Louis XVIII), "cette vierge aux champs crétois ravie" (for Europa), and "le champ où la mort nous appelle" (for a cemetery) were not only banal but frequent. The *Ballades* had begun to show originality, particularly of subject matter and meter. In the *Orientales* precision, color, and picturesqueness more and more replace neo-classical abstractions. The poet still uses a good many classical nouns (such as *onde*, *nef*, *trépas*, *nocher*, *coursier*), but his epithets are bolder, more original, more heavily charged with precise metaphorical value. While we can only hint at this subject which is too vast to be treated here in detail,² there is ample evidence to show that the years of 1827 to 1829 mark the beginning of important developments in Victor Hugo's poetic style. If they are in part the result of a conscious, intellectual effort in which the influence of Sainte-Beuve can now and again be seen — particularly in Hugo's adoption of certain stanza-forms of the *Pléiade* — they are also the outgrowth of another talent which the poet possessed and which accounts for his close association with men like Boulanger, Delacroix, the Deveria brothers, and Théophile Gautier. Like

² For a full treatment see M. Robertson, *L'Épithète dans les œuvres lyriques de V. Hugo publiées avant l'exil* (Paris, Jouve, 1926).

these men Hugo was passionately interested in painting, and he was himself an artist of no mean ability. At this date he had done some sketches and written some articles of art criticism. His best paintings and sketches were to be done later.³ But he already possessed a visual imagination and a capacity for precision and color which did not fail to enrich his literary production and ultimately make him, in Thibaudet's striking phrase, "un grand homo faber," a great artisan in the domain of literature.

In spite of the poems inspired by the Greek war, the *Orientales* justly gave greater satisfaction to those who preferred purely imaginative and artistic poetry than to those who believed in the social mission of literature. Perhaps for that very reason Victor Hugo was glad to redress the balance by publishing within a month the *Dernier jour d'un condamné*. Not that he was moved by mere calculation or concern for tactic. The reasoning and emotion which gave birth to his new narrative were profoundly sincere. The problem of the death penalty was at the time agitating men's minds. In 1827 Charles Lucas had won an important prize and acquired fame with his pamphlet, *Du système pénal et du système répressif en général et de la peine de mort en particulier*. The question was debated in the Chamber of Deputies where the aged La Fayette spoke on the abolitionist side. Hugo could not have been ignorant of the movement of opinion. In addition, more than one public execution had horrified him during the preceding years. Now in the winter of 1828-29, while crossing the square in front of the Hôtel-de-Ville, he saw the public executioner putting the guillotine in condition for the following day. The man's cold-blooded nonchalance struck Hugo more violently than the actual execution might have done. The next day he began work and in three weeks his manuscript was completed. His composition was enriched by certain documentary sources revealed by Professor Charlier: the diary of the last days of a certain

³ See R. Escholier, *Victor Hugo artiste* (Paris, Crès, 1926).

Antoine Viterbi, published in 1826 by the *Revue britannique*, an article in *Le Globe* (Jan. 3, 1828) entitled "Dernières sensations d'un homme condamné à mort," and above all the *Mémoires de Vidocq*. With these elements, supported of course by his powerful imagination, Victor Hugo constructed the narrative of the *Dernier jour d'un condamné*. Doubtless not a great work, it is nevertheless important as the first symptom of that genuine humanitarianism which became more and more, as the years rolled on, one of Hugo's most striking, most reliable, and, in the opinion of the present writer, most admirable characteristics.

With such widely differing books did Victor Hugo salute the new year. But though they revealed uncommon range of talent, they were not sufficient. The quick way to fame and fortune, he realized, even as Voltaire had, was through the theater. *Cromwell* was known only to a small fireside audience. The footlights must be crossed and won. Sainte-Beuve, to be sure, was advising against it. He had been tactfully but firmly critical of *Cromwell*, and obviously thought that Hugo's talent did not lie in that direction. Moreover, the theater meant battle, and entrance into those lists was, he suggested, a degradation for a lyric poet. Then political censorship added to an author's difficulties. But the attraction of the theater was too strong to be denied. Hardly were the *Orientales* and the *Dernier jour d'un condamné* off the press when Hugo set to work on *Marion de Lorme*.

The play was originally entitled *Un duel sous Richelieu*, and was perhaps suggested in part by Alfred de Vigny's recent historical novel, *Cinq-Mars*. Not that the aristocratic hero of Vigny's narrative reappears in Hugo's text. Far from it. Didier, the protagonist of Hugo's play, may be as much of an "homme fatal" as Vigny's marquis, indeed, from the beginning he describes himself as "funeste et maudit." But he is of unknown parentage, and consequently devoid of position or rank. The central theme of the play, the rehabilitation of a courtesan

through love, is also a far cry from Vigny's book. But some of Vigny's condemnation of Richelieu's policy toward the nobility and his picture of the king's weakness have certainly crept into Hugo's text. Hugo read his play to a specially distinguished gathering of the Cénacle at which both Vigny and Balzac — as well as Sainte-Beuve, Delacroix, and the usual habitués — were present. Though Vigny was secretly irritated,⁴ the applause of all the others was unstinted, and the hopes of the author and friends ran high. Unfortunately they were quickly shattered, for the régime of Charles X refused to authorize a play which exposed a French monarch's weakness. Even a personal interview between Hugo and the King failed to lift the ban. This was Hugo's first encounter with tyranny. He could only bow to authority and put his play in a drawer where it was to lie for two years. Meanwhile, nothing daunted, he began on August 29 the composition of *Hernani*.

The play was written in less than a month. On September 30 Victor Hugo read it to another distinguished and even more enthusiastic meeting of the Cénacle. A minor poet of the period, Boulay-Paty, has left an account of that memorable evening.

Two weeks ago last Wednesday [he wrote to a friend] I received an invitation from Mme Hugo to attend the reading of a new five act play in verse entitled *Hernani*. I was extremely flattered for there were hardly sixty people present, all celebrities of the hour. Alfred de Vigny, Nodier, Mme Tastu, Mme Belloc, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, Vitet, Boulanger, David, Deveria, A. Deschamps, etc. Victor read us his play in a powerful sonorous voice which was perfectly suited to his great lines. Heavens, what poetry! How admirable is the style! One might reproach him with a few improbabilities, but how quickly they are forgotten before these vivid, picturesque, and energetic expressions!

This initial success was quickly followed by another. On October 5 Hugo read his play to the company of the Théâtre-

⁴ M. Citoleux, "Alfred de Vigny, Victor Hugo et *Marion de Lorme*," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1928).

Français. There, too, it was acclaimed, and arrangements were made at once for its performance.

The subject, like that of Corneille's first great success, *Le Cid*, came from Spain. And, like the seventeenth-century play, *Hernani* has a fervor, an epic ring, a poetic power which were to sweep all before it. Even today, over a hundred years later, if played by artists of the first rank, *Hernani* can capture an audience and carry it to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. The plot is so well known that any detailed analysis is unnecessary. Its melodramatic absurdities have been emphasized time and again. From the beginning when we are asked to believe that Doña Sol, the well-bred daughter of a noble Spanish house, receives in her bedroom at midnight an outlawed bandit (with no explanation as to how they met) to the end when Hernani and Doña Sol are forced by the jealousy of Don Ruy Gomez to commit suicide on their wedding night, one violent antithesis succeeds another. True, the rivalry for the hand of Doña Sol, which constitutes one of the main interests of the play, is accompanied by another theme suggested by the subtitle: *l'honneur castillan*. How exclusively Castilian this conception of honor is, may well be open to doubt, for the same standard of honor, as Professor Guilloton has shown, had already appeared in the Frenchman, Léopold d'Auverney, in *Bug Jargal*. However that may be, a high and rigid sense of honor dominates *Hernani* and leads to the final tragedy. Yet this theme, far from attenuating the melodrama created by the rivalry for Doña Sol, tends to accentuate it.

The love affair between hero and heroine has been placed by Hugo against a background of history. The action of the play takes place in 1519. Carlos is not only King of Spain but a candidate for the throne of the Holy Roman Empire made vacant by the death of Maximilian. The political ambition of Carlos becomes another of the principal themes treated by Hugo. It inspires the long monologue of the fourth act when Carlos soliloquizes, Hamlet-wise, before the tomb of Charle-

magne. It furnishes ultimately the basis for Carlos' sudden and almost miraculous transformation of character from séducer to statesman. Renouncing Doña Sol, pardoning Hernani, Don Ruy Gomez, and all others who had conspired against him, Carlos displays a generosity and nobility of soul in profound contrast to his escapades of the first three acts. Victor Hugo may have thought he was being historical in presenting Carlos in these varied moods. He cited a chronicle by a certain Alaya in support of his presentation. As a matter of fact, no such chronicle has ever been found and there is no sound historical evidence suggesting that the great Charles the Fifth had any time or inclination even before his election as emperor for the rôle of *vert galant*.⁵ For informed people this side of the play is as incredible as the personal drama is for all but the most romantic.

Whatever we may think of the play today, no doubt exists concerning the sensation it made in 1830. The first performance on February 25 at the Théâtre-Français was tumultuous. Succeeding performances were no less so. Théophile Gautier has told in a well-known and dramatic chapter of his *Histoire du romantisme* the story of that first evening. One of the most famous claques in the history of the French theater was organized to support the drama. It was not a professional claque; it was the Cénacle organized and enlarged into a claque. The password was *Hierro* (Iron) written by Hugo himself on a square of red paper. This alluded to the epigraph *Hierro despiertate* (*Fer, réveille-toi*) which Hugo had placed at the head of one of his *Orientales* and which was the war cry of the ancient tribe of Almogavares. Like those warriors of old the Cénacle was advancing to battle, and armed with this password it crowded into the Théâtre-Français well before the pub-

⁵ Hugo's Carlos resembles the grandson of the great Charles the Fifth. This grandson also bore the name of Carlos and was the son of Philip II. He had as preceptor in his youth Don Ruy Gomez de Silva. This Carlos, incidentally, is the hero of Schiller's play. See G. Lotz, *En préface à Hernani* (Paris, Gamber, 1930), p. 109.

lic sale began, occupying those sections which the theater had put at Hugo's disposal. The poet's supporters wore on this historic occasion the most original and unconventional costumes, in sharp contrast to the formal attire of the regular theatergoers. Théophile Gautier, for example, appeared in a rose-colored doublet, pale green trousers, and black broadcloth jacket with velvet lapels. When the classicists and the bourgeois arrived they found this band of radical youth before them. As Gautier put it. "Two systems, two parties, two armies, it is not too much to say two civilizations confronted each other, hating each other cordially, as one hates in literary quarrels, and ready to swoop down on each other." And according to all contemporary testimony they swooped. From the very first line with its revolutionary "enjambement" to the final curtain the theater was in an uproar. For Hugo systematically violated all the classical rules. Not only did he depart from the rigid classical versification, but he defied the unities of time, place, and action. The scene shifts in every act; the action of the play takes far more than the twenty-four hours allowed by the seventeenth century; the dramatic construction is far more complicated than in the plays of Racine. Hugo also had the courage to abandon the restrictions placed on vocabulary by the classicists. He dared call a spade a spade. Instead of composing a long circumlocution to indicate the hour of day or night, he dared say simply: "midnight." All these things provoked the most violent reactions from both sides of the audience, the classicists howled their disapproval, the young men roared their applause. In the words of one of Hugo's supporters: "If there had been a sixth act, we should all have collapsed."

The audience was, however, unanimously responsive to the passages of lyrical or epic beauty which the play unquestionably contains. Classical adherents could not help admiring those lines in which *Hernani* pictures his fallen comrades:

Monts d'Aragon! Galice! Estramadoure!
— Oh! je porte malheur à tout ce qui m'entoure! —
J'ai pris vos meilleurs fils; pour mes droits, sans remords
Je les ai fait combattre, et voilà qu'ils sont morts!
C'étaient les plus vaillants de la vaillante Espagne!
Ils sont morts! ils sont tous tombés dans la montagne,
Tous sur le dos couchés, en braves, devant Dieu,
Et si leurs yeux s'ouvraient, ils verraient le ciel bleu!

Such poetry was not to be resisted. Nor could Hugo's opponents fail to be impressed by the great scene in Ruy Gomez' picture gallery (reminiscent of the Masserano palace in Madrid which Hugo had known as a boy). In that scene the king demands that Ruy Gomez either give up Hernani or allow him to carry off Doña Sol in his place. But Ruy Gomez had welcomed Hernani, disguised to be sure as a pilgrim, as his guest. Dominated by his sense of honor, he finds the courage to defy the king and he does so in eloquent, stirring lines which aroused the whole audience to enthusiasm. Nor could this audience fail to be moved by the lyric beauty of the fifth act which brings the two lovers together for a wedding ceremony on a glorious moonlit night only to plunge them into death in a dénouement suggestive of *Romeo and Juliet*. The play has incontestable beauties which brought about the triumph of Romanticism in the French theater. For *Hernani* had in 1830 a run of forty-five performances, a very large number for the time, which gradually wore the classical opposition down. Long before the last performance Victor Hugo knew that in spite of the coolness of the press he had conquered.

Yet the play has fatal weaknesses in addition to those already suggested. Not only is the plot melodramatic to the point of being unbelievable, not only is the use of contrast carried to absurd extremes, but, most serious of all, the characterization is both superficial and unreal. In a play of action there is little opportunity for psychological analysis. From

what little there is, incredible characters emerge. We have already mentioned the miraculous transformation of Carlos for which we are totally unprepared. Equally serious defects are found elsewhere. Don Ruy Gomez, presented as a man of highest honor, commits without compunction, and what is worse, without reflection, an act of the lowest jealousy. Doña Sol, the proud daughter of a proud Spanish house, allows herself to fall in love with a bandit. He turns out, we realize, to be the Duke of Aragon, but she could in no way have imagined or suspected that when she fell in love with him. And Hernani himself is an extreme example of an "homme fatal," a man who believes himself different from all other men, isolated, alone, and destined to misfortune.

Tu me crois peut-être,
Un homme comme sont tous les autres, un être
Intelligent, qui court droit au but qu'il rêva
Détroupe-toi Je suis une force qui va!
Agent aveugle et sourd de mystères funèbres!
Une âme de malheur faite avec des ténèbres!
Où vais-je? je ne sais Mais je me sens poussé
D'un souffle impétueux, d'un destin insensé

In such lines, which remind one of Chateaubriand's unhappy creation, René, does Hugo characterize his hero. The play may be reminiscent in some respects of Corneille, but as far as human character is concerned we are as remote from *Le Cid* as possible. For where Corneille created men and women who were "masters of their fate" and "captains of their souls," Hugo has created in Hernani a man who believes himself a victim of fate without sufficient will power to struggle against it.

Doña Sol, once her love for Hernani is admitted, is a reasonably consistent character, ultra-romantic, brave, and devoted. Some critics and biographers have seen in her a reflection of Adèle Hugo, and there is some foundation for that view. The Spanish girl undoubtedly recalls Adèle's brunette beauty. And Hernani courts her in terms closely reminiscent of the *Lettres*

à la fiancée. Tristan Legay in an article entitled "Les Amours de Victor Hugo," published in his volume *Victor Hugo jugé par son siècle*, has listed a number of parallel passages. So when Hernani calls Doña Sol *calme, innocente, et pure*, there is reason to think that Hugo had his young wife in mind. There is, then, some justification for identifying Adèle Hugo as the model of the heroine. But otherwise there is a tremendous difference between the two women. It is difficult to imagine Adèle Hugo falling passionately in love with a bandit, throwing her arms about the bandit's neck, and exclaiming, "Vous êtes mon lion superbe et généreux" (Even the actress Mlle Mars balked at saying that, and according to a well-known story substituted the word *seigneur* for *lion* at the first performance.) The scene in which Doña Sol plucks a dagger from the king's belt and threatens to stab him is one for which Adèle Hugo would be poorly cast. Nor would she be well suited to the dénouement. In 1829 Adèle Hugo was a young woman of considerable grace and dignity, but she was no such bold, impetuous, and exciting spirit as was Doña Sol.

This theory concerning the origin of the heroine has been recently used to support a Freudian interpretation of the play. Mr. Josephson, in his *Victor Hugo*, believes not only that Doña Sol is Adèle Hugo but also that the King and Don Ruy Gomez are reflections of General Hugo or Pierre Foucher. Hugo's "unconscious hatred," he says, "shifted alternately from his own father to his future father-in-law as the being who seemed most likely to thwart his purpose," and adds, "in *Hernani* the hero who 'kills himself' is represented as being (symbolically) slain by his own 'father,' for his dying words, in reference to the ancestral horn that shatters his dream, are, 'O father, thou vengest thyself upon thy son who forgot thee'." The only trouble with this interpretation is that it is completely untenable. During the years preceding the composition of *Hernani* Victor Hugo was on excellent terms with both his father and Pierre Foucher. In 1828 the General died and a year later Hugo

was still quite sincerely mourning his loss. As for the hero's "dying words," all that they mean is that fate has caught up with Hernani and he is being punished for having pardoned Carlos too readily and forgotten his duty to his father. While a spirit of rebellion was admittedly latent in Victor Hugo, it did not break forth in any Freudian fashion in *Hernani*.

For the generation of 1830 the important thing about *Hernani* was the overthrow of classical rules and standards. The young men of 1830 therefore acclaimed Hugo as a liberator. He had helped in the emancipation of French poetry from the slavery of cumbersome rules. Almost single-handed he had cracked the defenses of the French classical theater. His fame was indeed widespread. Yet another great victory lay ahead. The novel was still unconquered. Those early *coups d'essai*, *Han d'Islande* and *Bug Jargal*, could hardly be considered as *coups de maître*. But before Hugo could transform his new ambitions into reality France was shaken by the Revolution of July.

The cause of that upheaval, it will be remembered, was the proclamation of the Polignac "ordonnances" abridging certain civil liberties guaranteed by the Charter of 1814. Such an act aroused the hostility of all those who genuinely believed in constitutional rather than despotic monarchy. It certainly won the condemnation of Victor Hugo, fresh from his experience with the royal censor. In a letter to a friend, Adolphe de Saint-Valry, written on August 7, 1830, Hugo relates how he replied to the ultra-conservatives who praised the Polignac "ordonnances," saying to them: "Paris has overthrown the makers of coups d'État. No more Polignacs! No more Bourbons even! Ministry and dynasty, the one culpable, the other blind, have got only what they deserve." Is this too harsh a statement from a man who but a few years earlier was composing Bourbon odes and accepting Bourbon favors? Some critics have thought so, forgetting that this judgment was expressed in a private letter, and perhaps repeated in private conversations. In print Hugo very carefully and honorably made the neces-

sary distinctions. While he proclaimed his satisfaction concerning the political change, he did not fail to express his pity for the exiled monarch. In an ode "A la jeune France," republished later in the *Chants du crépuscule* under the title of "Dicté après juillet 1830," the poet said of the departing Bourbons:

Oh! laissez-moi pleurer sur cette race morte
Que rapporta l'exil et que l'exil remporte
Vent fatal qui trois fois déjà les enleva!

Je ne leur dirai point de mot qui les déchire
Qu'ils ne se plaignent pas des adieux de la lyre!
Pas d'outrage au vieillard qui s'exile à pas lents!

Hostile critics, like Biré, tend to overlook these lines in order to concentrate on Hugo's tribute to the revolutionists and his salute to liberty:

Oh! l'avenir est magnifique!
Jeunes Français, jeunes amis,
Un siècle pur et pacifique
S'ouvre à vos pas mieux affermis
Chaque jour aura sa conquête
Depuis la base jusqu'au faite,
Nous verrons avec majesté,
Comme une mer sur ses rivages,
Monter d'étages en étages
L'irrésistible liberté!

The author of these lines can certainly be classified as a liberal, for while they do not contain a program, they indubitably reveal a basic sentiment

They are the logical outgrowth of an attitude assumed several months before when Victor Hugo said in a preface to *Le Sylphe*, by Charles Dovalle, that romanticism is nothing more or less than "liberalism in literature" and added "Liberty in art, liberty in society, that is the two-fold goal toward which all consistent and logical minds should strive in unison."⁶

⁶ Reprinted in the preface to *Hernani*.

Meanwhile Hugo's literary activity had been interrupted. He had been planning to write a historical novel; indeed, he had signed a contract in 1828 to deliver the manuscript in exactly five months. That promise had been thwarted first by his adventures in the world of the theater and now again by political events. Finally in September 1830, Hugo really got down to work. In four short months he completed that extraordinary book which he entitled *Notre-Dame de Paris* and which is perhaps better known in this country under its moving-picture title of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.

The influence of Walter Scott on *Notre-Dame de Paris* is evident. Like Scott, whose novels were widely read in France during the twenties, Hugo returned to the Middle Ages for his subject. Like Scott, Hugo attempted to place fictitious characters in a historically authentic background. But Hugo sought also to ally Walter Scott and Homer, to create, in other words, a novel which would be "both drama and epic, picturesque but poetic, real but ideal, true but great." *Notre-Dame de Paris* is, then, a historical novel, but it is also, as Hugo confesses, a "work of imagination, caprice, and fantasy."

That it is a work of imagination is abundantly clear from the plot, for only an imagination unbridled as Hugo's too frequently was could have produced such an accumulation of melodramatic events based on such extravagant, incredible antitheses. Claude Frolo is perhaps modeled in part on the Abbé Oegger, vicar of Notre-Dame and confessor to the queen; but he is certainly much more the product of Hugo's fancy, for this learned Catholic priest, hitherto ascetic, whose only weakness has been his dabbling in alchemy, is represented as falling irresistibly in love with a beautiful gypsy girl whom he sends, after failing to seduce her, to an ignominious death. Esmeralda, the gypsy girl in question, inspires a pure devotion in the heart of the hideous hunchback Quasimodo, the most sensational example of Hugo's theory of the union of the sublime and the grotesque. Quasimodo saves the girl momentarily from exe-

cution, foolishly protects her (in a new antithesis) against her would-be saviors, the beggars of Paris, and when he is finally outwitted by Claude Frollo, and Esmeralda has been definitely captured by her executioners, he turns on the priest who had rescued him in babyhood and hurls him from the towers of Notre-Dame to his death on the pavement below. Esmeralda turns out to be the kidnaped daughter of an old, half-crazed hermit woman who lives in squalor in a hole in the wall by the Place de Grève. It is the mother who at the last moment betrays the girl to the police only to discover an instant later her real identity. Melodrama is obviously heaped on melodrama, and the characters are as improbable and unreal as the characters of *Hernani*.

Yet, while these defects are all too apparent, the novel won a spectacular success. The great Romantic musician Hector Berlioz went into ecstasies over it. So did Théophile Gautier who dubbed it a "true Iliad" and who has testified to the unanimity of the Romantics' applause. And certainly this novel, like *Hernani*, contains remarkable beauties. There is first of all the picture of medieval Paris. From the towers of Notre-Dame Hugo gives us a bird's-eye view of the city spread out below. To prepare himself to write this text Hugo read among other things Sauval's *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris*, du Breul's *Théâtre des antiquités de Paris*, the *Chroniques* of Pierre Mathieu and of Comynes, the *Dictionnaire infernal* of Colin de Plancy, the *Comptes de la prévôté*. Armed with this information he calls up before our enchanted eyes a magnificent vision of the fifteenth-century town with its clearly marked sections. the *Cité* lying compact around the base of the cathedral on its island in the middle of the Seine, the *Université* on the left bank with its "thousand angular roofs", the *Ville* on the right bank, easily identified by the gates of Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin which gave access to it from the north. "Paris," declared Hugo, "was not only a beautiful city, it was a homogeneous city, an architectural

and historical product of the Middle Ages, a chronicle of stone." And Hugo caps this description with another still more famous: the ringing of the church bells over Paris on a great feast day such as Easter or Pentecost. The passage needs to be read in the original French to be thoroughly appreciated. Never was Hugo to write more poetic, more winged prose.

Disciple that he was of Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo took equal pains with his description of the great cathedral itself whose symbolic mass rises so majestically above the city. For him, as for the author of *Le Génie du christianisme*, Gothic architecture was synonymous, not with the barbarous, as seventeenth-century writers had thought, but with the beautiful. Hugo lovingly evokes the medieval monument, lingering over the description of façade and towers, and the sculptures of the great portal, lamenting the subsequent disappearance of many an ancient masterpiece. "A symphony of stone," he dubs it, for he views it as a poet, as an architect, as an artist. Rarely does he lay any emphasis on its religious significance, an astonishing fact when one thinks of his early Catholicism. It is, indeed, an indication that the faith of his childhood has already weakened. Théophile Gautier referred to Hugo's Notre-Dame as the "shell" containing "the monstrous snail" that is Quasimodo! When the cathedral is reduced to that rôle, one may well say, as Louis Maigron does, that its religious meaning and value have been fundamentally distorted.

Then there are the extraordinary descriptions of the Court of Miracles and the bell-ringing of Quasimodo. In both, Victor Hugo gives free rein to his tremendous imagination. In a veritable cascade of metaphors he calls up before us that sinister section of old Paris dominated by the beggars and thieves of yesteryear. In a vision that approaches the apocalyptic he evokes Quasimodo ringing the bells of Notre-Dame, jumping in his excitement on the biggest bell of all, and swinging back and forth over the abyss below him in a mad frenzy of sound and motion. Descriptions such as these are ultra-romantic.

They depart in subject and form from all classical standards. They inevitably arouse, from some critics, the cry of bad taste. And, indeed, they are dangerous, for if the writer be lacking in skill, they may well verge on the inane. But in *Notre-Dame de Paris* they seem to liberal-minded critics extraordinarily successful. When placed beside descriptions of a more conventional type, they reveal in Hugo a range of talent rarely equaled in the history of literature.

Stylistically, then, *Notre-Dame de Paris* is a great book. The medieval background is reasonably authentic and is magnificently depicted. Hugo's description of Paris in the fifteenth century won high praise from so eminent an archaeologist as Ernest Feydeau, and his evocation of the cathedral received a warm tribute from the well-known historian of medieval art, Émile Mâle. The latter devoted volumes to proving that these stupendous edifices reflected not only the faith but the thought of medieval man. Hugo, too, recognized the intellectual significance of Notre-Dame. "In the Middle Ages," he wrote, "the human race has had no important thought which it has not inscribed in stone." Émile Mâle comments eloquently. "We have laboriously demonstrated what the poet perceived with the intuition of genius."⁷ Yet, in spite of these undeniably splendid qualities, *Notre-Dame de Paris* cannot be considered a first-rate historical novel, for the characters are not genuinely representative. Certainly Claude Frollo is not a typical priest of the time, nor is Phœbus de Châteaupers a typical aristocrat. All judges of the Middle Ages did not suffer from the handicap of Maître Florian whose deafness provided an amusing but unique scene when the worthy judge was confronted for the first time in his career by a prisoner as deaf as himself. Hugo has chosen in these cases characters possessing traits far too special to permit us to view them as representative. Like *Hernani*, *Notre-Dame de Paris* belongs to serious literature only because of Hugo's extraordinary poetic talent.

⁷ E. Mâle, *L'Art religieux du 13^e siècle en France* (Cohn, 1902), p. 433.

The novel was a revelation of the magnificence of his prose style and made his literary position even more enviable than before.

Indeed, when one reflects on Victor Hugo's accomplishments in the three years just narrated, one cannot, even today, fail to be profoundly impressed. *Les Orientales*, *Marion de Lorme*, *Hernani*, *Notre-Dame de Paris*! What a stupendous literary production in so short a time! Little wonder that Hugo's contemporaries looked upon him with something like awe. Was he perhaps some god descended from Olympus? At the age of twenty-nine he was an acknowledged master in three major literary fields—poetry, drama, and novel. His prestige and authority had now definitely outstripped those of Vigny and Lamartine. He was the undisputed leader of the Romantic school.

Yet with all his glory a subtle change had come over him. When, in 1829, Hugo's portrait had been done by Deveria, he had seemed a supremely happy man. Surrounded by his family and by devoted friends he was the envy of his contemporaries. His ardor, his confidence, and his serenity were evident to all and were reflected in Deveria's lithograph. Two or three years later that confidence and above all that serenity had been shattered. In 1832 a new picture was made of him by Léon Noel. It reveals, as M. Guimbaud has already said, the presence of doubts and suspicions. The glance is somber and severe, the lips tightly pressed together, the expression joyless, the very flesh seems sickly. What is the explanation of this change? Not literary failure. The man had known nothing but success. Not, surely, the fall of a dynasty. Hugo felt pity for the aged king forced into exile, but nevertheless approved of the revolution which sent him there. The explanation must be sought then, not in literary or political events, but in Victor Hugo's private life. To that subject we must once again turn our attention.

CHAPTER IV

SERPENTS IN THE GARDEN

Car le baril de poudre a peur
de l'étincelle — V H

I

THE trouble was that Sainte-Beuve had fallen in love with Victor Hugo's wife

A strange, tortured, and obscure tale is the narrative of the critic's love, for Sainte-Beuve was a strange and tortured person, addicted to obscure and devious ways. Talented beyond any doubt, he displayed, in this episode at least, moral characteristics which hardly arouse one's admiration, while Hugo's conduct is deserving of the greatest respect and sympathy.

When Sainte-Beuve entered the poet's home for the first time, Mme Hugo was nursing Charles, then a small baby, and was caring for Léopoldine who was two and a half years old. She was a busy young mother and seems, naturally enough, to have been hardly conscious of Sainte-Beuve's presence. Soon Sainte-Beuve was a daily guest, and if Adèle Hugo was still unaffected by his presence, he was by no means unmoved by her charm. He says in *Volupté*, which is partly inspired by these events, that "after six months' association he still found himself in a state of vagueness concerning her, in a state of suspended sentiment which far from arising from indifference came rather from extreme respect and from his excessive scrupulousness about probing himself in this matter." Such scruples are both excessive and revealing.

As time went on, Sainte-Beuve became still more intimate with the Hugo family. The birth of François-Victor so moved

him that he at once composed "La Veillée" in order to salute appropriately this happy event. And the following year, 1829, saw Sainte-Beuve established quite definitely as the friend of Adèle as well as of Victor. She received him, he later wrote in *Volupté*, "always seated by the window, a bit of embroidery on her lap," her beautiful head with its lustrous black hair bent over her work. These were "delicious moments," he confesses, "when one asks for nothing, when one believes that one desires nothing." By now he had ceased avoiding her glance and conversation.

As I had avoided looking at her formerly, so now I became as avid to contemplate her. I haunted curiously with my eyes that sweet, noble face, I penetrated that ingenuous expression. I spelled out, in some sort, every line of that great beauty, like a holy book, and a little difficult which some friendly angel kindly held out open for me.

And in another passage of *Volupté* Sainte-Beuve tells of his long conversations with Adèle Hugo, conversations in which religion furnished the customary topic. Assuming the rôle of Tartuffe, this essentially rational and even skeptical man seems to have had in 1829 numerous mystical moments. They were, he states, "the most beautiful in my life at that time and the best." This familiarity, he adds, was all the more attractive as it was indefinite and as "the delicate bond which hovered between us . . . could be either recognized or not and slipped away at will beneath this mutual *enjouement* which favors budding affections."

The conversations with the wife were made possible in part by the husband's progressively greater absorption in the theater. The composition of *Marion de Lorme* and *Hernani*, in spite of Hugo's extraordinary facility, engaged many hours. Preparations for the performance of *Hernani* occupied still more. While Hugo was absent, Sainte-Beuve was able to converse with Adèle about her husband and about religion. And yet Hugo's contact with the theater irritated Sainte-Beuve. He

felt, as the reader will remember, that it tended to degrade a lyric poet. Then when this activity not only took Hugo away from his lyrics but began to penetrate his home and hearth, when it began to come close to the gentle and pure Adèle, Sainte-Beuve's irritation was extreme. Hugo's house became, naturally enough, the headquarters of the group preparing for the battle of *Hernani*, it was invaded by the romantic cohorts; its quietness was destroyed; its mistress drawn into this unfortunate whirlpool. A few days before the performance Sainte-Beuve could contain himself no longer; he wrote Hugo an amazing letter, a tortured combination of praise and disillusion: praise for *Hernani*, "an admirable work," disillusion concerning Hugo's attempt to bring art before the general public.

In truth [he writes], when I see what has been happening to you for some time, your life forever a prey to all, your leisure lost, the redoublings of hatred, the old, noble friendships drifting away, the fools and madmen who are replacing them, when I see the wrinkles and clouds on your brow which do not come from the travail of great thoughts alone, I can only feel afflicted, I can only regret the past, salute you with a gesture and go hide myself I know not where

But the postscript to the letter is the most significant part of all:

And Madame? She whose name should resound on your lyre only when people listen on bended knee to your songs, she is exposed to profane eyes every day, distributing notes to more than eighty young men hardly known before yesterday, this chaste and charming familiarity, the true prize of friendship, forever sullied by the crowd, the word devotion prostituted, the useful appreciated above all, materialistic combinations dominating everything!!!

If Victor Hugo did not at once understand the inner meaning of these lines, in a few short months he could not fail to do so

In July Hugo's second daughter, Adèle, was born. The mother's accouchement was a difficult one, followed by long

months of fatigue and semi-invalidism It necessitated for an indefinite period a physical separation of husband and wife from which the former, still a young man, undoubtedly suffered, and which certainly contributed to the approaching psychological crisis. For this separation came at a time when Hugo was beginning to realize the intellectual and aesthetic incompatibility which existed between Adèle and himself. While she appreciated to some extent his plays and above all valued the material successes won by her husband, she understood nothing of his poetry In the days of his courtship he had persuaded himself that innocence and appreciation of poetry went necessarily hand in hand In 1830 after seven or eight years of married life it was more difficult to maintain that illusion

In the meantime relations with Sainte-Beuve remained serene The critic was godfather to little Adèle, performing his functions at the baptismal ceremony in September About that time he wrote to Victor Pavie in a melancholy vein lamenting the absence of love in his barren existence "My malady and my crime," as he put it, "is not to be loved as I should like to be, I who love" At this date, Sainte-Beuve's sentiments for Adèle Hugo have increased in intensity, perhaps all the more as they remained as yet wholly unrequited His melancholy became more marked, till finally at the end of November or early in December he could endure it no longer. In an interview with Victor Hugo he confessed to the poet that he was in love with his wife

We have, of course, no direct information concerning that confession That it occurred we know from subsequent events which also authorize us to infer that Victor Hugo, moved as well as surprised by the confession, urged Sainte-Beuve to dominate his feelings and to try to keep their association on the old level of warm and satisfying friendship. Perhaps Sainte-Beuve promised to try, but on December 7 he wrote his friend that it was no use:

My friend, I cannot endure it; if you knew how my days and nights are spent and to what contradictory passions I am a prey, you would have pity on the one who has offended you, and you would wish me dead.

Confessing, furthermore, that there were moments when he felt not only despair but rage, Sainte-Beuve announced that it was impossible for him to resume the old relationship in the old way and that the only course open to him was to withdraw. To this extraordinary epistle Victor Hugo immediately replied (December 8, 1830) in the noblest terms "Time will heal everything; let us hope that some day we shall find in this only reasons for being fonder of each other. Come to see me often. Write to me always." But Sainte-Beuve did not return to the Hugo fireside. On December 23 he wrote that his decision was irrevocable. The poet urged him the next day to continue at least to write even if he felt that he could not do more.

The year 1830, then, which had brought Hugo a great literary triumph, closed on this personal anxiety. One of his two or three best friends was in love with his wife. His own relations with Adèle were no longer what they had been in the first years of their marriage. While, of course, he had no reason to doubt her fidelity, the situation was nerve-racking, and he could not help feeling profoundly shaken. The long, intense hours spent on the final composition of *Notre-Dame de Paris* must have been a welcome escape from reality.

The next four months are somewhat obscure. At New Year's, to be sure, normal sentiment gained the upper hand. Sainte-Beuve sent a present to Léopoldine and was invited to dinner in return. From then till March the two men probably had little if any contact. Then came the completion of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and with it Victor Hugo's request to Sainte-Beuve to review the novel in *Le Globe*. Sainte-Beuve replied in a letter which revived the old issue and actually sought to throw blame on the poet.

However guilty I may have been toward you [he wrote], however guilty I may have seemed to you, I thought, my friend, that you were then, in view of our intimacy, guilty of wrongs toward me, wrongs of lack of confidence and frankness

This incredible missive Hugo answered on March 18 firmly, but with the same nobility he had not failed to display.

I did not believe that what has passed between us, what is known to us two alone in the world, could ever be forgotten, especially by you, by the Sainte-Beuve I have known. You must remember what occurred between us on the most painful occasion of my life, at a moment when I had to choose between her and you! remember what I told you, what I offered you, what I proposed to you with the firm resolution, as you well know, to keep my promise and to do as you would wish, remember that, and think that you have just written me that in this affair I was lacking in confidence and frankness toward you. I forgive you for that from this moment. Perhaps a day will come when you will not forgive yourself

Not only has the manuscript of this admirable letter been preserved, but also Sainte-Beuve's private comments on it. Opposite the words "what is known to us alone in the world," he wrote: "false; he had taken advantage of it with her, by attributing to me what I had not said." Next to the words "at a moment when I had to choose between her and you," he commented. "He was lying to me at the very moment and was playing a double game." Today it is clear that if either of these two men were lying, it was not Victor Hugo

Two weeks later Sainte-Beuve capitulated. Not, of course, generously, not whole-heartedly, not honestly, but subtly and with reservations. Protesting against Hugo's severity, claiming that he meant no offense, he declared that he would accept "with joy, pride, and gratitude" even the slightest place in Hugo's friendship, and he closed by asking permission to go shake the poet's hand. Victor Hugo, by no means a subtle person, took the letter at its face value, invited Sainte-Beuve to dinner, and reopened his house to the man in whose loyalty he still tried to believe.

The two were supposedly on their old footing of friendship and literary alliance. Perhaps they both honestly tried to revive the old atmosphere. If so, they were completely unsuccessful. After three short months Victor Hugo had to admit that the situation was intolerable. On July 6, 1831 he wrote Sainte-Beuve a touching, a painful letter.

What I have to write to you [he said] causes me deep pain . . . This three months' trial of a half-way intimacy, badly resumed, badly patched up, has not succeeded. It is not our former irretrievable friendship. When you are not present, I feel in the depths of my heart that I love you as I formerly did, when you are present, it's a torture.

Let us cease then for a time to see each other in order not to stop caring for each other.

In a postscript Hugo added that the letter had been read by "the only person who should read it" before him.

This time Sainte-Beuve found himself dismissed. The dismissal was more than courteous and considerate; it was noble and pathetic. But it was a dismissal nonetheless. Furthermore, if Hugo is to be credited, and there seems no reason for doubting him, it was the act of both husband and wife.

Sainte-Beuve could only bow before this decision. He did so in letters which rival Hugo's in pathos and in nobility of expression. They do not, however, reveal his real sentiments which are suggested in a conversation recorded by Fontaney, a now forgotten writer, who was a frequent contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Revue de Paris*. Fontaney's diary, since published under the title of *Journal romantique*, contains an interesting entry, dated October 31, 1831.

I stayed a long time with Sainte-Beuve. He walked home with me and we talked of Victor Hugo. "He is a scoundrel," he said to me. And he indulged in extraordinary confidences.

"Victor had become jealous! and through pride! and that is his wife's sickness! . . ."

What a contrast between such remarks and the letters written a few short weeks before!

For more than a year the two men saw little or nothing of each other. Their literary contacts, however, remained unbroken. Hugo sent the critic a copy of his lyrics, *Les Feuilles d'automne* (published December 1, 1831) which Sainte-Beuve reviewed with apparently genuine enthusiasm in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. And they corresponded as before. The terrifying cholera which swept over Paris in April, the brief Republican insurrection of June (which was to be used by Hugo in *Les Misérables*) and the accompanying proclamation of a state of siege, the suppression of *Le Roi s'amuse*, inspired letters which were invariably cordial, frequently affectionate.

Whether Sainte-Beuve secretly saw Adèle Hugo and secretly corresponded with her during this year and the following one, whether, in short, she became the critic's mistress has been a highly controversial problem about which biographers from Gustave Simon to Louis Barthou and Matthew Josephson have differed. That there was a correspondence is certain. That Adèle finally yielded to Sainte-Beuve's subtle pleadings has been contested, but, in the light of recent revelations this is also certain.

A letter from Sainte-Beuve, written at the end of 1831 or early in 1832, seems in itself convincing.

My beloved Adèle [he wrote], how good and beautiful you were yesterday! and how many eternal and delightful memories that half-hour in that chapel-corner will leave with me. We love each other forever without a single possible shadow between us, and if unsurmountable material obstacles unfortunately arose, they would immediately vanish, they would not count, since we should know how to die together and in each other's arms. At the time¹ to which my memory led me back yesterday, two persons in the world loved me greatly, an old aunt and my mother. My old aunt died, but you have come, loving me as much as she did and in a fresher way, your young

¹ Fourteen years earlier, the year he first arrived in Paris.

kisses (tes jeunes baisers) have replaced hers: they are the only ones that will soon remain to me when my mother is no longer here.

This strange love-letter was found in Sainte-Beuve's papers, and is presumably a copy of the original, though some biographers think that it is the original and was never sent to Adèle Hugo. They believe that Sainte-Beuve was merely satisfying desires impossible of realization by setting down on paper things that he wished were true. But the letter's testimony appears to be confirmed by lines written later and with little more discretion and reserve in the *Livre d'amour*.² Published privately and anonymously in 1842, the volume was not destined by Sainte-Beuve for the general public. It circulated only among a few friends and acquaintances, but was nonetheless an objectionable act on Sainte-Beuve's part and it was quite justly denounced as an infamy by Alphonse Karr in *Les Guêpes* (April 1845).

The poems relate the history of the critic's love for Adèle who is mentioned by name, as well as her two daughters Léopoldine and little Adèle for whom, it will be recalled, Sainte-Beuve acted as godfather in 1830. The earliest poems date from 1831, the critical year, but their content includes the earlier period when Sainte-Beuve first entered Hugo's household. At that time Adèle appeared to him a little like "a queen and a goddess" seated "beside genius." For two years or more he experienced only friendship. Then one day he found Adèle alone; entering, he sat down, and joined with her in conversation. She was still in her *négligé* and, adds the poet:

Ta beauté dans l'oubli dévoilait sa lumière
Un moment, au miroir, d'une main en arrière,
Debout, tu dénouas tes cheveux rejetés
J'allais sortir alors, mais tu me dis "Restez!"

² There is also a story written by Sainte-Beuve, entitled *Mme de Pontivy*, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1837), which contains undoubted analogies to his affair with Mme Hugo. It irritated and depressed Hugo, but it contains less convincing proof than the *Livre d'amour*.

Et, sous tes doigts pleuvant, la chevelure immense
 Exhalait jusqu'à moi des senteurs de semence
 Armée ainsi du peigne, on eût dit à la voir,
 Une jeune Immortelle avec un casque noir
 Telle tu m'apparus, d'un air de Desdémone,
 O ma belle guerrière! et toute ta personne
 Fut divine à mes yeux

From that moment he knew that he was in love.

The same poem describes his resistance which lasted for another year or two, and then gives us to understand that the author's own emotion was finally communicated to Adèle and before long was shared by her.

Pour toi, plus de sommeil, tes paupières chargées;
 Sous leurs cheveux pâlis, tes tempes ravagées,
 Ce doux front qui baignait aux purs rayons du ciel,
 Et virginal encor dans l'aspect maternel,
 Sillonné tout à coup d'un reflet de délire,
 Ces six mois de tourments, toi seule peux les dire,
 Toi seule aussi tu peux dire les jours meilleurs,
 Ta clémence, et le bien que te firent mes pleurs

Platonic, for a while, was this affection. They saw each other and wrote to each other, but they stoically remained in "le bonheur permis"

Beginning with poem XXIV the emphasis on their purely platonic relations vanishes completely from the text. Then comes a passage (in poem XXVII) which seems to indicate a greater intimacy Boulanger, supported by others, had wanted to paint Mme Hugo as she appeared in a long white peignoir which set off admirably her dark beauty But, according to Sainte-Beuve, she refused for the following reason:

Belle, ils me disent tous, se dit-elle à demi,
 Je l'étais donc hier en tes bras, mon Ami?
 Je l'étais, blanche aussi, dans ces mêmes parures,
 Et tu me disais vrai dans tes tendres murmures
 Va, sois tranquille, Ami, jamais ce doux portrait,
 Que l'amitié trop vaine à l'amour ravirait,

Ne sera qu'en discours, je saurai m'y soustraire,
Avec art, s'il le faut, esquiver la prière,
Tenir bon au propos ou flatteur ou moqueur;
Je me veux seulement ressemblante en ton cœur

Other poems refer to their rendezvous in the old "Hôtel Saint-Paul." Unless the *Livre d'amour* be a barefaced lie, as some biographers assume, there would seem to be little doubt concerning the relations between Adèle Hugo and Sainte-Beuve.

That the *Livre d'amour* is not a mere wish-fulfillment has been pretty definitely established by the recent discovery of the content of letters which Adèle Hugo wrote to Sainte-Beuve. Those letters were destroyed long ago and for many years nothing was known about them except the fact that they had once existed. But in 1937 M. Léon Deffoux writing in the *Mercure de France*^a revealed the truth. The letters had been burned in 1885 by a group of four men including Paul Foucher, Edouard Lockroy, Dr. Paul Chéron, and Henry Havard. Havard confided to a private manuscript the essential facts. He says:

From the first letters read over, I saw emerging from this heap of yellowed papers the irrefutable, blinding proof of a stupid and banal adultery — romantic assuredly

This document he left to the Bibliothèque de Mâcon where M. Deffoux was able to consult it and to refute those biographers who were being more chivalrous than realistic. On the basis of this evidence there can be no possible doubt concerning the relations of Adèle Hugo and Sainte-Beuve.

If we stop to speculate on the reasons which impelled Adèle Hugo to succumb to the wiles of a man far less attractive than her husband, we can only surmise that she found her husband extremely self-centered, indifferent to her wishes and desires, and rather too obviously superior. She could not deny that he was a great man. But he undoubtedly had the conceit from

^aL. Deffoux, "A côté du *Livre d'amour* Les lettres de Mme Hugo à Sainte-Beuve," *Mercure de France* (June 1, 1937)

which many geniuses suffer. Sainte-Beuve flattered her and appeared to respect her opinions. His very lack of physical attraction may have appealed to her as a welcome relief from the god-like beauty of the Olympian Victor. Only the burnt correspondence could say whether these speculations are true.

The only remaining question is whether Victor Hugo knew of their relations and, if so, when. If Léon Daudet is to be believed, Hugo knew of his wife's infidelity, for the simple reason that Sainte-Beuve sent some of Adèle's letters to her husband. Of course it seems almost incredible that Sainte-Beuve should have done such a contemptible thing, but Léon Daudet declares flatly (in the *Action française*, March 21, 1937) that in 1885, accompanying Georges Hugo and Edouard Lockroy, he went to Hauteville House and there they discovered a large sealed envelope with the word *Pudenda* inscribed on the outside. When the envelope was opened, love letters from Adèle Hugo to Sainte-Beuve fell out. While Léon Daudet was not a very reliable person, it does not seem likely that he would or could invent such a narrative.

But the question as to just when Hugo learned of the infidelity remains unsolved. In 1831 and 1832 he may have had some inkling of the fact that Adèle had not been wholly unmoved by Sainte-Beuve's homage. That is perhaps the meaning of the sentences he included in a letter written on July 7, 1831 to his perfidious friend: "I am no longer happy. I have acquired the certitude that it was possible for the person possessing all my love to cease to love me. . . I no longer know where I stand with the two beings I love most in the world. You are one of them." For the first time, Victor Hugo knew the meaning of melancholy.

The year 1831 wore on to its close. It was followed by a year which brought little satisfaction to the poet, for 1832 was filled with disasters. It was, as we have seen, the year of the cholera, the year when insurrection broke out in Paris, the year when *Le Roi s'amuse* was suppressed, the year which saw

a continuance, if not an aggravation, of the crisis in the domestic life of Victor and Adèle Hugo; 1833 was doubtless unusually welcome to all those who had suffered during 1832. In the personal life of Victor Hugo the new year was to usher in an event of utmost importance.

II

On the second day of the new year Victor Hugo attended an artists' ball. There he beheld a beautiful girl by the name of Juliette Drouet.⁴ Six weeks later she became his mistress.

Her original name was Julienne Gauvain and she was born on the tenth of April, 1806. Adopted by an uncle, René-Henri Drouet, at a tender age, she was sent by him to Paris in 1816 to the boarding school run by the Sisters of the convent located in the rue du Petit-Picpus. She remained there six years, but as she was unfitted for the religious life into which the Sisters tried to lead her, she returned to the world, and we soon find her leading the most mundane existence. At nineteen she became the mistress of the sculptor Pradier to whom she bore in 1826 a daughter. Later she turned to the theater, and after studying in Brussels she obtained a small part in Paris at the theater of the Porte-Saint-Martin where she made her début in February 1830. She possessed some slight dramatic talent which, combined with her unquestioned beauty and charm, won for her initial success in the French capital, where she adopted without much reflection the Bohemian existence led by so many young actresses. In 1832 the principal patron of her extravagant living was a Russian millionaire, Prince Demidoff. But her theatrical career lay in the hands of Harel, the director of the Porte-Saint-Martin and also of the Odéon.

This was the girl whom Victor Hugo met on January 2, 1833. She passed before him like a "bird of flame," and he was dazzled by her ardor, her fire, her magnificent black hair and

⁴ See the poem "A OI" in *Les Voix intérieures*

eyes, her entrancing smile, the classically pure contour of her face and figure. That evening he hardly dared approach her.

A few days later Harel suggested Mademoiselle Juliette for a rôle in Hugo's new play, *Lucrèce Borgia*. The author promptly gave her a small part, that of the Princess Negroni, a "charming, good-humored woman, fond of poetry and music." Rehearsals furthered their acquaintance. Juliette seized this opportunity, as she later confessed, to make advances; she was both coquettish and mischievous. Hugo, on the other hand, treated her with the utmost respect, called her formally Mademoiselle Juliette, kissed her hand, and bowed low before her. Frédéric Lemaître, the actor, said that he could hardly believe his eyes.

The first performance came on February 2, 1833 and the play was a great success. While Juliette's part was small, she performed it well, creating, as Théophile Gautier said, "a true Italian princess with a gracious and deadly smile," so charming as a poisoner that one forgot "to pity her unfortunate guests" and "thought them lucky to die after kissing her hand." He adds "One would have said that she was a snake standing erect on its tail, so swaying, supple, and serpentine was her gait. Through all her grace how well she knew how to impart a suggestion of something venomous." She won not only the applause of the audience, but also the congratulations of the leading lady, Mlle Georges, and of the author, Victor Hugo.

Only two weeks more were needed to overcome Hugo's timidity and high principles. Made unhappy by the Sainte-Beuve affair, perhaps finally irritated after ten years of marriage by Adèle's complete incomprehension of his poetic masterpieces, enervated by the conjugal abstinence imposed upon him, Hugo was in a mood to seek consolation. Late in the evening of February 16 he made his way to Juliette's apartment in the rue de l'Echiquier. That night saw the consummation of their liaison.

It endured with remarkably few crises for fifty years,

terminated, in fact, only by Juliette's death in 1883. One crisis, however, came almost immediately. Juliette had apparently broken with her Russian prince, but she had not given up her extravagant mode of life. The money she earned or could earn as an actress was quite inadequate. A financial debacle was unavoidable, and what was worse, a confession of her financial situation had to be made to Victor Hugo. Stormy scenes ensued. Juliette suddenly left Paris in August 1834 and rushed to Brest to take refuge with a married sister. But now Hugo could not do without her. He followed her almost at once, a reconciliation took place; and the pair returned together to Paris.

The solution of their problem was genuinely Romantic. Juliette was to redeem her past by a life of penury, sacrifice, and fidelity. Hugo assumed all her financial obligations, more than forty thousand francs. It was a heavy burden for a young man, successful playwright and novelist though he was. He then rented for her an inexpensive flat in the appropriately named rue de Paradis and gave her an income of 750 francs a month, half of which was to be used to help liquidate her debts. There, Juliette lived on the most modest scale, renouncing all the luxuries, refinements, and even physical comforts to which she had been accustomed, and devoting herself exclusively to her poet. She furnished, in short, a living demonstration of the famous Romantic theory of the rehabilitation of the courtesan through love, a theme which Hugo had developed in a five-act play only five years before. "My poverty, my clumsy shoes, my faded curtains, my cheap spoons, the absence of ornament and all pleasure apart from our love," she writes, "testify at every hour and every minute that I love you with all my heart." So did the coldness of her flat, for she had to save money by economizing on fuel. And so, above all, did her solitude which amounted to sequestration, for she gave up her former friends and social activities. Hugo was almost the only person she ever saw. In this way she redeemed her past.

And her dramatic career? It had already been adversely affected by her failure in *Marie Tudor*, caused, it is thought, by a hostile claque which hissed all of her entrances. Through Hugo's influence she was received as a member of the Comédie Française, and her hopes rose. But either his influence was not exerted or was insufficient to obtain parts for her, for none came her way. She did not even receive the rôle she coveted in *Angelo*, Hugo's next theatrical venture. And when she tried to get the part of the queen in *Ruy Blas*, Mme Hugo intervened and prevented it. So for half a century she really lived entirely for her lord and master. Ultimately their liaison became almost as respectable as a conventional, bourgeois marriage.

That Juliette Drouet inspired a great deal of Hugo's poetry goes without saying. Especially during the first years of their intimacy we find not only complete poems composed in her honor, but lines and stanzas scattered throughout the poet's work which reflect in some way their association. Above all, Juliette gave Hugo the admiration he naturally craved, admiration for his person, but particularly for the products of his pen. I am sure that she was not really much more intellectual than Adèle Hugo. But she had a sincere feeling for poetry, and she was wise enough always to be interested and always to express unrestrained enthusiasm. She also possessed, to Hugo's great delight, a genuine and deep love of external nature. In September 1834, after their great reconciliation, the poet took her to the valley of the Bièvre where they spent six weeks, and where they were to return the following year. On both occasions Hugo and his family were guests of Bertin, the famous editor of the *Journal des débats*, at Les Roches. Juliette had a room, a few kilometers away, in the hamlet of Les Metz. The lovers met daily in the woods. There was an old chestnut tree about half-way which marked their rendezvous, and which also served them as a letter-box. Under its branches they met and loved. From there they started on their daily walks, spending enchanted hours in the midst of those pleasant landscapes. Of

this valley and of Juliette's love of nature Hugo wrote in a poem addressed to Vergil,

J'ai trouvé, mon poète, une chaste vallée
A des coteaux charmants nonchalamment mêlée,
Retraite favorable à des amants cachés,
Faite de flots dormants et de rameaux penchés,
Où midi baigne en vain de ses rayons sans nombre
La grotte et la forêt, frais asiles de l'ombre'

Pour toi, je l'ai cherchée, accompagné de celle
Qui sait tous les secrets que mon âme recèle
Et qui, seule avec moi, sous les bois chevelus,
Serait ma Lycoris, si j'étais ton Gallus,
Car elle a dans le cœur cette fleur large et pure,
L'amour mystérieux de l'antique nature

Such lines, placed in the chestnut-tree letter-box, were Juliette's reward for the happiness and admiration she gave her lover.

Their mutual love of nature was satisfied also on the longer journeys they took together almost annually. In 1835 and 1836 Juliette accompanied Hugo to Picardy, Normandy, and Brittany. With her he had his first glimpse of the great Atlantic and the surging foam on the rock-bound coast. In 1837 they journeyed together to Belgium and Holland where they admired not only the calm, smiling landscapes, but the carillons of the ancient cities of Flanders. Two years later they visited the Rhine, and the rugged, impressive scenery of Switzerland and the Alps. In 1840 another journey eastward carried the two lovers from Cologne to Mainz and into the valley of the Neckar. They were together on a trip to southwestern France in 1843 when one of the greatest tragedies in Hugo's life, the death of his daughter, Léopoldine, overwhelmed him.

These journeys were in some sense the high lights of their association during the early years, for back in Paris Juliette found that her happiness was far from undiluted. She saw Victor frequently, to be sure. Indeed, he had a corner in her apart-

ment with a desk and chair where he composed many a poem. And Juliette devoted herself to him, acting as his secretary, reading his proof, mending his clothes, preparing his favorite dishes. Yet there were long solitary hours. For a while she had the consolation of hopes for a dramatic career and used up much time learning parts. But soon that was gone. Her social contacts were severely limited by her situation. She consumed some moments of every day in writing her lover. love-letters, direct and simple, devoid of any intellectual interest, letters interminably repeating the leitmotif of love — letters which enchanted Victor Hugo. Yet time dragged heavily, so that at the end of their first journey to the Rhine she could not help uttering a complaint: "Here I am returned to my scribbling, my Toto, a sad pleasure if there ever was one, especially after the two months of love and intimacy which have just passed . . . So I fear like death itself our return to this hideous Paris where there is nothing for lovers who love each other as we do." It was not an altogether satisfying or easy existence which Juliette endured in the shadowy background of Victor Hugo's life.

The two women played complementary rôles in the poet's existence. Adèle was beautiful, a devoted mother, a gracious hostess; she was, in her husband's own words, "a woman with a pure brow, a stately walk, and gentle eyes," and Victor Hugo gave her outwardly at least the respect and admiration which those qualities deserved. He seems, indeed, to have continued to love her in a quiet way which makes it doubly difficult to believe that he was completely cognizant during the early years of her relations with Sainte-Beuve.⁵ Juliette, on the other hand, was not only beautiful — certainly more beautiful than Adèle — but she had all the wit and vivacity, all the sparkle and fire, all the sensuality and passion which Adèle lacked. She doubt-

⁵ Those relations undoubtedly came to an end in 1837 if not before. Léon Daudet thinks Sainte-Beuve sent some of Adèle's letters to Hugo in 1856 not long after he went to Guernsey. See L. Daudet, *La Tragique Existence de V. Hugo* (1937).

less had something of the modern sportswoman in her, too, and was a magnificent comrade on a cross-country tramp Adèle sat by the fireside, watched over the children at play, and gave her husband a cup of tea on a raw winter's afternoon If Juliette satisfied Victor Hugo's desire for adventure and passion, Adèle continued to satisfy his instinctive aspirations for order and stability The two women are symbolized by the *torche* and *flambeau* of which he later wrote:

Mais, toi, rien ne t'efface, amour! toi qui nous charmes,
Toi qui, torche ou flambeau, luis dans notre brouillard!
Tu nous tiens par la joie, et surtout par les larmes
Jeune homme on te maudit, on t'adore vieillard
— "Tristesse d'Olympio"

Impetuous ardor and serene tenderness, inspired by mistress and by wife. such is the meaning of the poet's symbolism

CHAPTER V

THE LYRIC POET

Peuples! écoutez le poète!
Écoutez le rêveur sacré
— V. H

INDIFFERENCE to political events, to religious problems, to economic conflicts is not the explanation of Victor Hugo's decision to publish in 1831 a purely lyrical volume. We have seen that the *Odes et Ballades* and even *Les Orientales* reveal political preoccupations. The preface to *Les Feuilles d'automne* also discloses Hugo's concern with the events of the hour. "The political moment," he declares, "is grave . . . Within, all social solutions have been again questioned . . . Abroad, here and there, on the face of Europe, entire peoples are being assassinated, deported en masse, or placed in chains . . ." Nevertheless, Hugo deliberately determined to reserve political poems for a later volume, he decided to postpone adding to his lyre a "corde d'airain", now, in 1831, he felt it desirable to appeal to the permanent emotions of the human heart unchanged by revolution or by war. "Poetry," he says, "speaks to man, to the adolescent it speaks of love, to the father, of family, to the old man, of the past." Of these themes he proceeded to write.

Les Feuilles d'automne, then, are a collection of poems inspired by the great lyric themes of childhood, nature, and love. The more intimate, domestic type of inspiration plainly perceptible in this volume is perhaps due to the influence of André Chenier's *Élégies* or more probably to Sainte-Beuve and to the latter's familiarity with Wordsworth. For the young critic was one of the very few French Romantics to be attracted to the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Byron, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Scott were the real favorites of the great Cénacle. But Words-

worth's theory of the poetic value of common incidents and domestic things rendered in the language of ordinary life appealed particularly to Sainte-Beuve. He declared in one of the poems of *Joseph Delorme* that he was quite willing to leave to Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nodier, and Hugo the vast horizons and dramatic scenes of external nature; as for himself, he preferred more modest sources of inspiration.

Quoi! des rocs, des forêts, des fleuves? oh! non pas,
 Mais bien moins, mais un champ, un peu d'eau qui murmure,
 Un vent frais agitant une grêle ramure,
 L'étang sous la bruyère avec le jonc qui dort

And in accordance with this doctrine Sainte-Beuve let himself be inspired by such subjects as "L'Enfant rêveur," "Le Creux de la vallée," "La Veillée," and "La Plaine." In 1829 and 1830, while he was still on intimate terms with Victor Hugo, he seems to have partially converted his famous friend to this conception, for *Les Feuilles d'automne* include, in addition to more grandiose themes, such poems as "Où donc est le bonheur," "Lorsque l'enfant paraît," "Dans l'alcôve sombre," and "Bièvre," all limited in scope, but nonetheless profoundly poetic.

The volume shows a marked evolution on Victor Hugo's part, not only in sources of inspiration, but also in poetic technique. *Les Orientales* had blazed with color and teemed with fantasy. *Les Feuilles d'automne* are closer to reality, and this reality is rendered in a quieter, simpler, less spectacular style. While the subject matter is lyrical and romantic, Hugo's art seems rather to be more classical. Not that he reverts to the neo-classical banalities of his early *Odes*. Far from it. The evolution begun in 1827-28 toward a firmer and more mature poetic style is not abandoned.¹ And there are still, as in *Les Orientales*, some Romantic figures of speech and flaming color. In "Soleils

¹ See M. Robertson, *L'Épithète dans les œuvres lyriques de V. Hugo publiées avant l'exil*. See also on *Les Feuilles d'automne*, the excellent edition by L. Bisson (Oxford, 1944), which came to the present writer's attention while this book was going through press.

couchants," which were inspired by those late afternoon walks of the Cénacle mentioned at the beginning of our third chapter, Hugo's imagination permitted him to see in a cloud

. . . un grand crocodile au dos large et rayé,
Aux trois rangs de dents acérées,
Sous son ventre plombé glisse un rayon du soir.

Even though a Parisian sunset was the inspiration, this imagery is reminiscent of the fantastic visions of the *Orientales*. But the evolution away from the *visionary* may be seen in such a stanza as the following.

Le jour s'enfuit des cieux, sous leur transparent voile
De moments en moments se hasarde une étoile,
La nuit, pas à pas, monte au trône obscur des soirs,
Un coin du ciel est brun, l'autre lutte avec l'ombre,
Et déjà, succédant au couchant rouge et sombre,
Le crépuscule gris meurt sur les coteaux noirs

If Hugo is still a painter, these lines show him to be closer now to a Corot than to a Delacroix. Together with many other passages of this collection (for example, the first section of "La Prière pour tous" and the first three of "Bièvre") they can be appropriately placed in the great classical tradition of poetic literature.

Yet in its treatment of personal themes *Les Feuilles d'automne* is an essentially romantic volume. The first pages pay eloquent tribute to the author's parents. His mother's love and devotion are recalled in the opening poem, from which we quoted in our initial chapter. An equally warm tribute to his father is the central theme of the second poem of the collection, in which, addressing his lines to Louis Boulanger, Victor Hugo begins by evoking his father's house at Blois.

cette maison
Qu'on voit, bâtie en pierre et d'ardoise couverte,
Blanche et carrée, au bas de la colline verte,
Et qui, fermée à peine aux regards étrangers
S'épanouit charmante entre ses deux vergers.

This house, alas! no longer echoes with the General's tread,
and Hugo laments his death in simple, touching lines:

Hélas! il ² a perdu cette sainte défense
Qui protège la vie encore après l'enfance,

Hélas! il a perdu la moitié de sa vie,
L'orgueil de faire voir à la foule ravie
Son père, un vétéran, un général ancien!

If any proof were needed that Hugo had been wholly reconciled with his father and harbored no grudge against him this text would surely furnish it. Of this poem Montalembert — who in later years was to become a bitter adversary of Hugo — wrote in a letter to the poet: "You will not be surprised if I put above all in this collection your number 2. 'A Louis B.', on the death of your father. I almost said *my* father, so thoroughly have you plumbed all the depths of this cruel grief, to such an extent have you lifted the veil that covers this irreparable void in a young man's life."³ And Montalembert went on to report that Lamennais had read the volume with an enthusiasm equal to his own.

But the great revelation of *Les Feuilles d'automne* is Hugo's treatment of the theme of childhood, which, as far as we know, he is the first to introduce into French poetry. Only a modest part of this volume, three or four poems out of forty, is devoted to this subject, an obvious reflection of the poet's private life, but it has brought Hugo universal praise. Even hostile critics have joined in the applause, particularly in the case of "Lorsque l'enfant paraît," one of the poet's masterpieces, which because of its length can be quoted only in part:

Soit que juin ait verdi mon seuil, ou que novembre
Fasse autour d'un grand feu vacillant dans la chambre
Les chaises se toucher,
Quand l'enfant vient, la joie arrive et nous éclaire

² Hugo

³ See the Ollendorff edition of *Les Feuilles d'automne*

On rit, on se récrie, on l'appelle, et sa mère
Tremble à le voir marcher

Il est si beau, l'enfant, avec son doux sourire,
Sa douce bonne foi, sa voix qui veut tout dire,
Ses pleurs vite apaisés,
Laisant errer sa vue étonnée et ravie,
Offrant de toutes parts sa jeune âme à la vie
Et sa bouche aux baisers!

Seigneur! préservez-moi, préservez ceux que j'aime,
Frères, parents, amis, et mes ennemis même
Dans le mal triomphants,
De jamais voir, Seigneur! l'été sans fleurs vermeilles,
La cage sans oiseaux, la ruche sans abeilles,
La maison sans enfants!

These simple lines, free from flamboyance, have been well suggested, if not completely rendered, by Mme Duclaux's English translation which I take the liberty of including here.

When June casts a green shade, or when November's gloom
Lights a great fire with dancing shadows in our room,
Where we draw round and talk —
With what delight we watch our youngest born appear!
We laugh, call out his name, the mother, half in fear,
Applauds his tottering walk!

There's nothing in our world as innocent and gay!
The sweet adventurous voice that still would say its say,
Though the words come amiss!
The roving, wondering glance that ever roams and shifts
He gives his soul to Life as simple as he lifts
A fresh mouth for a kiss

Harken, O Lord, my vow, and grant my prayer for those
I love, for brothers, friends — ay, even for my foes
The most unreconciled
Preserve us from a June no crimson roses throng,
A hive without a swarm, a cage without a song,
A home without a child

A very sentimental poem, to be sure, which perhaps does not appeal as much today as a hundred years ago, but its sincerity and simplicity are still winning qualities. It was undoubtedly one of the poems which, in 1831, led Sainte-Beuve to declare that "*Les Feuilles d'automne* seems to us, as to everyone, Hugo's most beautiful, most complete, most touching lyrical volume."

Yet among these forty poems, there are a few that strike a different note. On the one hand, the ode, "A M. David, statuaire," though composed, as Professor Souriau says, with an "old-fashioned majesty" reminiscent of Malherbe, contains a wealth of imagery and suggestive thought. David d'Angers wrote to a friend: "Hugo read to me the ode written in my honor, there is an idea at every word, and this idea is great in the manner of Phidias." M. Souriau adds. "David is right in thinking of classical beauty. Never has Hugo approached it so closely. A breath of Vergilian poetry passes through and uplifts *Les Feuilles d'automne*."

In another direction, poems like "Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne" and "Pan" announce further poetic development. The first calls up a grandiose vision of sea and land, within its lines reverberate the voice of nature and the voice of humanity. It raises questions which will haunt the poet in coming years. The second contains advice to poets which shows clearly that the author did not intend to limit himself to the Wordsworthian conception.

O poètes sacrés, échevelés, sublimes,
Allez, et répandez vos âmes sur les cimes,
Sur les sommets de neige en butte aux aigilons,
Sur les déserts pieux où l'esprit se recueille,
Sur les bois que l'automne emporte feuille à feuille,
Sur les lacs endormis dans l'ombre des vallons!

"Go," he repeats, "mingle your soul with all creation," and in this same lyrical volume he evokes, in "La Pente de la rêverie," a mighty vision of the past, epic in tone, a prelude, as Levail-

lant says, "to the vast reconstitutions of the *Légende des Siècles*."

The last poem of *Les Feuilles d'automne* repeated the assertion made in the preface that political questions could not be ignored. That assertion Hugo now made good. Poems inspired by political and social events were indeed forthcoming; but instead of grouping them in a separate volume, Hugo scattered them, along with poems of personal inspiration, throughout his next three books. As a result, *Les Chants du crépuscule* (1835), *Les Voix intérieures* (1837), and *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1840) do not differ radically from *Les Feuilles d'automne*. On the contrary, all four volumes form an important unit in the poet's work. They are dominated by the great lyric themes of love, nature, family, the inexorable flight of time; themes which have inspired poets since the beginning of literature. Technically, they continue the evolution manifest in *Les Feuilles d'automne*. Hugo's metrical skill, his command of vocabulary and metaphor, his almost classical restraint fulfill the promise of the 1831 volume.

Les Chants du crépuscule, published on October 27, 1835, seek, both in lyrical and political poems, to express "this strange twilight condition of the soul and of society in the period we live in", or, as the poet puts it in his "Prélude".

De quel nom te nommer, heure trouble où nous sommes?
Tous les fronts sont baignés de livides sueurs
Dans les hauteurs du ciel et dans le cœur des hommes
Les ténèbres partout se mêlent aux lueurs

Croyances, passions, désespoir, espérances,
Rien n'est dans le grand jour et rien n'est dans la nuit,
Et le monde, sur qui flottent les apparences,
Est à demi couvert d'une ombre où tout reluit

This confusion and anxiety do not, however, lead the poet to despair, for he declares in the last sentence of his preface that "he belongs to those who hope."

The political poems of the volume include "Dicté après juillet 1830," already analyzed in an earlier chapter, a new ode "A la colonne," "Napoléon II," an eloquent poem, inspired by the death of the emperor's son, a magnificent "Hymne" of patriotic fervor, and a couple of poems devoted to Canaris, a hero of the Greek war for independence. Only the first of these poems is genuinely liberal in thought and tone. "A la colonne" is a frankly Bonapartist ode; "Napoléon II," inspired by the death (July 22, 1832) of the Duc de Reichstadt,⁴ is much more an epic celebration of the emperor than a lamentation on the disappearance of his child. Both poems contain, however, unforgettable lines and stanzas, like the one which so brilliantly sums up the great disasters experienced by Napoléon I:

Demain c'est le cheval qui s'abat blanc d'écume
Demain, ô conquérant, c'est Moscou qui s'allume,
La nuit comme un flambeau.
C'est votre vieille garde au loin jonchant la plaine.
Demain, c'est Waterloo! demain, c'est Sainte-Hélène!
Demain, c'est le tombeau!

The poem is not striking for its profundity of thought, but lines such as these, which, incidentally, announce the theme of "L'Expiation," are proof of poetic power

Because Hugo's talent was now universally recognized, he was chosen by the government to compose a hymn in honor of those who died during the three glorious days of July. In response to this he produced a masterpiece.

Ceux qui pieusement sont morts pour la patrie
Ont droit qu'à leur cercueil la foule vienne et prie
Entre les plus beaux noms leur nom est le plus beau.
Toute gloire près d'eux passe et tombe éphémère;
Et comme ferait une mère,
La voix d'un peuple entier les berce en leur tombeau

⁴ See chapter VII, p. 124

Gloire à notre France éternelle!
Gloire à ceux qui sont morts pour elle!
Aux martyrs! aux vaillants! aux forts!
A ceux qu'enflamme leur exemple,
Qui veulent place dans le temple,
Et qui mourront comme ils sont morts!

The poem, unspoiled by any note of chauvinism, has retained since 1831 the admiration and popularity it immediately received.

The only liberalism expressed in this volume, apart from "Dicté après juillet 1830," is to be found in two poems of humanitarian inspiration, "Sur le bal de l'Hôtel de Ville" and "A M. le Duc d'O." The former reveals Hugo's concern for the hungry and the poor, the latter, his pity for those who may be driven by circumstances into crime. The poems perhaps combine, in Sainte-Beuve's witty and malicious words, "monarchical reminiscences, Christian phraseology, and Saint-Simonist aspirations." Nevertheless, for all their seeming contradictions, these poems are allied with the *Dernier jour d'un condamné* (already discussed) and *Claude Gueux*, published on September 6, 1834. This second humanitarian novel shows that Hugo was interested not only in the question of the death penalty, but also in general penology and, what is more, in the wider, more fundamental problem of poverty. Even though *Les Chants du crépuscule* are primarily lyrical, even though Hugo's liberalism as we turn the pages of this volume seems slight and possibly confused, the two poems just mentioned show that the liberal reformer is still alive, if momentarily absorbed in personal joys and sorrows.

Juliette Drouet is really the dominant inspiration of these Twilight Songs. No less than twelve of the thirty-nine poems owe their existence to her. They include such supremely beautiful lyrics as "Puisque j'ai mis ma lèvre à ta coupe encore pleine," "Nouvelle chanson sur un vieil air," "Puisque nos heures sont remplies," and "Dans l'église de *." They are, how-

ever, poems of experience and reality; here, as in *Les Feuilles d'automne*, the fantastic and the visionary give way to that which is essentially human and consequently closer to the classical tradition, though naturally they do not exhibit the restraint and measure of a Ronsard lyric. And they frequently mingle more than one lyric theme into a majestic whole. "Puisque j'ai mis ma lèvre," for example, unites the theme of love with that of the vitality of man's happiness; "Au bord de la mer" combines magnificent pictures of nature in a tribute to romantic love; "Dans l'église de*" is a complex pattern in which religious sentiment, epicureanism ("Jouissons! l'heure est courte et tout fuit promptement"), and love are skillfully interwoven.

Along with these poems to Juliette, Victor Hugo included three poems to Adèle: "Les autres en tout sens laissent aller leur vie," "Toi! sois bénie à jamais," and "Date lilia." It was admittedly not in the best taste for him to place both mistress and wife in the same volume, and more than one critic from Gustave Planche to Irving Babbitt and W. F. Giese has reproached him for it. Sainte-Beuve, of course, had the least right to criticize Hugo on this score, yet he dared in a malicious insinuation to accuse his friend of "throwing a handful of lilies in people's eyes," and lest that remark be not clear he added. "He (the author) has not seen that the impression of all would be that a respected person would have been better honored and praised by being wholly omitted." Once again Sainte-Beuve, in launching such an attack, suffers far more than his victim.

The critic sought to cover this perfidy with a certain amount of praise. In particular he justly eulogized the poem entitled "A Louis B," sometimes known as "La Cloche." This composition, he says, combines, in spite of a few blemishes, "reality and grandeur of metaphors, truth and sincerity of inspiration." Hugo was, of course, exploiting in his own fashion a poetic theme already popularized by Schiller and Chateau-

briand, which he himself treated in another form in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Here, he first evokes the church bell silent in the tower:

Vaste et puissante cloche au battant monstrueux!
Un câble aux durs replis chargeait son cou nouveau.

But to the poet it is surrounded by an obscure music,

Comme si, se parlant d'une confuse voix,
Dans cette ombre, où dormaient leurs légions ailées,
Les notes chuchotaient, à demi réveillées
Bruits douteux pour l'oreille et de l'âme écoutés!
Car même en sommeillant, sans souffle et sans clartés,
Toujours le volcan fume et la cloche soupire,
Toujours de cet airain la prière transpire,
Et l'on n'endort pas plus la cloche aux sons pieux
Que l'eau sur l'océan ou le vent dans les cieux

Then closer observation shows the poet that the bell is worn and even mutilated, just as he himself has been attacked and vilified. A long comparison follows, terminated by the promise that both the poet and the bell will continue to perform their function; they will both send forth their hymns. It is, as Sainte-Beuve says, a fine piece of poetry.

The twilight mood of this volume finds better expression in two poems partially inspired by two other friends of Victor Hugo, Alphonse Rabbe and Louise Bertin. The former was an unfortunate young man, tormented by an ugly and painful ulcer which led him finally to commit suicide on December 31, 1829. Nearly six years later Hugo, who had already composed one of his early odes in Rabbe's honor, is inspired by his memory. Hugo regrets in this poem the absence of this liberal scholar during the difficult period which France and Europe are crossing.

The other poem is more significant. Louise Bertin, by whom it was inspired, was the daughter of the editor of the *Journal des débats*. She was a talented young woman whose principal

interest was music. In fact, she collaborated with Victor Hugo in the production of an operatic version of *Notre-Dame de Paris*. They called it *La Esmeralda*. But Louise Bertin was also keenly interested in religious and metaphysical questions. To this friend Hugo addressed a poem which confirms the impression gained from *Notre-Dame de Paris* that he had lost the faith of his childhood. Indeed, as the subtitle, "Que nous avons le doute en nous," unmistakably indicates, the poem is a frank confession of skepticism. Far from glorying in it, Hugo laments his loss of faith. In his eyes doubt is an enemy, an evil, something which makes him sad and reflective, not as with Montaigne a philosophy of life. Hugo is an essentially religious person who would like to believe; indeed, as he declares, "who needs to believe," but whose intelligence no longer permits him to believe. Torn by this conflict between his head and his heart, the poet takes refuge in human affection.

Heureux qui peut aimer, et qui dans la nuit noire,
Tout en cherchant la foi, peut rencontrer l'amour!
Il a du moins la lampe en attendant le jour

To love, he concludes, is half of faith.

This poem is also interesting for the realism of its metaphors. For Hugo does not seek them in conventional beauty. On the contrary, he unhesitatingly uses the unpleasant and the ugly. Doubt he describes as a "spectre myope et sourd"; superstitions he sees as "hideuses vipères" which "fourmillent sous nos fronts où tout germe est flétri"; and he adds crushingly

Nous portons dans nos cœurs le cadavre pourri
De la religion qui vivait dans nos pères

Although the subject lends itself to this type of metaphor, not many writers at this period would have thought of using it. Such accents and such figures of speech are suggestive of Baudelaire. Twenty years before the appearance of *Les Fleurs du mal* Victor Hugo was already widening the domain of poetic imagery. *Les Chants du crépuscule*, far from marking "the

rapid decline of a fine talent" as Désiré Nisard thought, indicated further growth, deeper maturity.

The year 1837, which saw the publication of *Les Voix intérieures*, brought to a climax the difficulties and disasters which for some time had been showering upon Victor Hugo. His poetry had received as much hostile criticism as praise; his plays (to which we shall return in another chapter) continued to arouse a storm of opposition; his admission to the French Academy had been twice blocked. Now in 1837 Sainte-Beuve published a short story, *Mme de Pontivy*, where one might readily see an analogy to his love affair with Adèle Hugo. In 1837 the illness of Hugo's daughter, Léopoldine, was a source of anxiety. At the same time he himself suffered from serious eye trouble. In 1837 the death of his brother Eugène brought additional anguish to an old tragedy of long standing. It was a difficult year, indeed.

The new collection is, therefore, melancholy in tone. More personal than *Les Chants du crépuscule* it includes but two poems directly inspired by public events: a long meditation on the death of Charles X, entitled "Sunt lacrymæ rerum," and an ode to the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile which the government of Louis-Philippe had just completed. The name of the poet's father having been omitted from the list of generals engraved on the monument's walls, the son dedicated the new volume to him. The remaining poems are essentially lyrical and treat much the same themes as *Les Chants du crépuscule*.

The note of gravity perceptible in the two preceding books is heard still more deeply here. Taking Vergil as his "divine master" Hugo seeks to be "attentive to everything, sincere in everything." Avoiding close party affiliations he wants to remain "above the tumult, unshakable, austere, and benevolent." He is essentially the contemplator. For this purpose he creates a character who appears for the first time in his work: Olympio. He is, of course, a mere double, an *alter ego*, through whom the

poet replies to his critics. For a while Hugo thought of carrying this notion still further and composing a whole volume of poems to be called *Les Contemplations d'Olympio*. While he gave up this project, it is clear, as M. Levailant says, that in *Les Voix intérieures*, the *Contemplations* (of 1856) may be found in germ.

Nevertheless, few of these poems differ sufficiently from those of *Les Chants du crépuscule* to merit special attention. Those devoted to Juliette and those inspired by the poet's children, however admirable in themselves, reveal no new poetic technique, no new development of thought. The same judgment also applies to "Pensar, dudar," a more verbose treatment of the theme of "Que nous avons le doute en nous." Nor is his skepticism contradicted by the poem "Dieu est toujours là" which is essentially a reaffirmation of his belief in charity. Incidentally, the poem contains a number of stanzas in which Hugo evokes external nature with that simplicity and directness so completely different from his tendency toward oratory and complexity.

L'été, la nature éveillée
Partout se répand en tous sens,
Sur l'arbre en épaisse feuillée,
Sur l'homme en bienfaits caressants

Stanzas like this give the poem a greater literary value than the long development on charity.

Only four or five poems of this collection stand out markedly from the rest. "La Vache" is noteworthy for its plastic rendition of that homely animal, a symbol in Hugo's eyes of the benevolence of mother nature. "Passé" evokes in graceful, harmonious, and melancholy lines "un grand château" of the time of Louis XIII, on whose grounds Juliette Drouet and Victor Hugo walked together in 1837 even as royal lovers did in the past. "A Olympio," in spite of its defiance of the poet's enemies, in spite of its attempt to achieve a high serenity, re-

veals his deep sensitivity. "Ce siècle est grand et fort" is an important declaration of Hugo's faith in human progress, based on the triumph of man over matter:

O poètes! le fer et la vapeur ardente
Effacent de la terre, à l'heure où vous rêvez,
L'antique pesanteur, à tout objet pendante,
Qui sous ses lourds essieux broyait les durs pavés

L'homme se fait servir par l'aveugle matière
Il pense, il cherche, il crée . . .

The steamship and the railroad, those great symbols of mechanical progress which were being so widely developed in the 1830's, are suggested in these lines. For all his lyricism Hugo was not unconscious of what was taking place in the world about him.

The most moving poem of the volume is the one addressed to his dead brother, "A Eugène, Vicomte H." After a brief introduction in which Victor Hugo delicately describes the circumstances of Eugène's last years and death, there are three main poetic developments: reminiscences of their childhood, contrast between the difficult existence the poet must continue to lead and the tranquil sleep which Eugène has entered, a conclusion which seems to envy the peace and serenity enjoyed by the dead. The section devoted to the brothers' common childhood is a little masterpiece, profoundly touching in its graceful simplicity.

Doux et blond compagnon de toute mon enfance,
Oh! dis-moi, maintenant, frère marqué d'avance
Pour un morne avenir,
Maintenant que la mort a rallumé ta flamme,
Maintenant que la mort a réveillé ton âme,
Tu dois te souvenir!

Tu dois te souvenir des vertes Feuillantines,
Et de la grande allée où nos voix enfantines,
Nos purs gazouillements,

Ont laissé dans les coins des murs, dans les fontaines,
Dans le nid des oiseaux et dans le creux des chênes,
Tant d'échos si charmants!

On nous voyait tous deux, gaîté de la famille,
Le front épanoui, courir sous la charmille,
L'œil de joie enflammé . . .
Hélas! hélas! quel deuil pour ma tête orpheline!
Tu vas donc désormais dormir sur la colline,
Mon pauvre bien-aimé!

Even Gustave Planche, the grave and conservative critic of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* who was nearly always hostile to Hugo, was forced to admire the freshness, the gracefulness, and the moving quality of these lines which are among the finest of *Les Voix intérieures*.

Were it not for the preface to *Les Rayons et les ombres*, as well as for several poems which follow, "Fonction du poète," the opening composition of this new volume, would lead the critic to believe that Victor Hugo had completely accepted the notion of utilitarianism in poetry. Certainly he appears to have rejected the doctrine of art for art's sake, suggested in Théophile Gautier's preface to *Albertus* in 1832 and crystallized in Gautier's famous formula "Everything useful is ugly" (*Tout ce qui est utile est laid*) in 1835 (preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*). For in "Fonction du poète" Hugo categorically opposes the idea that the poet should remain indifferent to social movements and problems

Malheur à qui dit à ses frères.
Je retourne dans le désert!
Malheur à qui prend ses sandales
Quand les haines et les scandales
Tourmentent le peuple agité!
Honte au penseur qui se mutile
Et s'en va, chanteur inutile,
Par la porte de la cité!

Le poète, en des jours impies,
Vient préparer des jours meilleurs

Like Alfred de Vigny, who had recently declared in *Chatterton* that the poet was a pilot, Hugo believed that the poet should light the way to the future, and he bids the peoples of the earth to give heed to his counsel:

Peuples! écoutez le poète!
Écoutez le rêveur sacré

No sterile contemplation, no withdrawal into an ivory tower is envisaged by Victor Hugo.

Nevertheless, Hugo's conception is by no means restricted to the social mission of the poet. Indeed, he declares in the preface that a poet can produce a great work even though he has no direct contact with governments and parties. The ideal of impartiality and the refusal to take sides on controversial issues appeal to him strongly. While he believes that the poet must "contain the sum of the ideas of his time," he also believes that the poet should be inspired by man, by nature, and by God. The song of the birds will be heard in the poet's tragedies, the suffering of man will be seen in his landscapes, the splendor of God's creation will shine throughout his work. In conformity with this ideal, *Les Rayons et les ombres* include compositions of extraordinarily diverse inspiration. Nature poems, love poems, poems of social interest or significance, plastic poems devoid of any social or political content, childhood reminiscences, gropings toward some religious faith—all these themes inspire the poet.

That Hugo's political and social ideas are still in a state of flux is clear from two poems of this collection. "Regard jeté dans une mansarde" is an incredible hodgepodge which depicts a fair young girl of the working class, endows her with a father who died in the service of Napoleon (again eulogized by the poet), and warns her of a peril lurking by her side: a novel of the eighteenth century, the century of Voltaire whom Hugo

dubs an emissary of the devil. If this be social poetry, its tendency must have been disturbing to those who hoped for further liberalism from the author of *Claude Gueux*. More satisfactory from their point of view was the poem "Rencontre" which expresses the poet's indignation at the poverty, destitution, and undernourishment of four children whom he met one day on a highway near Paris. The realism of this picture, the tone which underlies the text, are more hopeful indications of liberalism than anything perceptible in "Regard jeté dans une mansarde." Yet even in "Rencontre" there is no statement of the author's ideas for reform, there is only sympathy and indignation.

The masterpieces of this collection are to be found elsewhere. The beauty, grace, and precision of "Écrit sur la vitre d'une fenêtre flamande" and "Que la musique date du 16^e siècle" should make these two poems even better known than they are. The carillon of Malines was the inspiration of the former:

Le carillon, c'est l'heure inattendue et folle
Que l'œil croit voir, vêtue en danseuse espagnole,
Apparaître soudain par le trou vif et clair
Que ferait en s'ouvrant une porte de l'air
Elle vient, secouant sur les toits léthargiques
Son tablier d'argent plein de notes magiques

In the second poem, before paying tribute to Palestrina, Hugo evokes a symphony played by a full orchestra. In both compositions there is a combination of plastic art and musical effect which gives them high distinction.

Four nature poems, which contain other themes as well, are justly celebrated. "Spectacle rassurant," "Ce qui se passait aux Feuillantines vers 1813," "Tristesse d'Olympio," and "Oceano Nox." The first is a warm, lovely, delicate picture in which nature is directly and simply observed and is presented to man as the guardian of the secret of the universe:

— Homme! ne crains rien! la nature
Sait le grand secret et sourit.

The second, from which we quoted in an earlier chapter, combines childhood reminiscences with another beautiful picture of nature again presented as a friend and wise counselor. These two poems (and such a poem as "La Vache" in *Les Voix intérieures*) place Hugo close to Lamartine of the *Méditations poétiques* in his conception of nature. Yet in this same volume we find Hugo taking a grimmer, less optimistic view "Tristesse d'Olympio" demonstrates the indifference of nature towards man; "Oceano Nox," the destructive power of nature forcing man to battle for his existence.

"Tristesse d'Olympio" is one of the major poems of French romanticism, and, till about 1928, a much maligned one. Critics tended to see in this magnificent work nothing but a piece of rhetoric, an admirable but essentially cold-blooded treatment of a given subject, a mere attempt by Victor Hugo to compete with Lamartine and Alfred de Musset. The former had won glory with "Le Lac." While Musset's "Souvenir" was not yet published, he had touched on the same subject in his "Nuit d'octobre." Hugo simply decided to treat in his turn this fruitful theme of memory.

Admittedly this literary inspiration is not absent from "Tristesse d'Olympio" which has not the admirable simplicity of "Spectacle rassurant" or "Nuits de juin." The text clearly reveals that the work of Hugo's two confreres was present in his mind. After all, that was quite legitimate. But recent scholars, above all M. Maurice Levaillant,⁶ have demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that "Tristesse d'Olympio" is more than rhetoric; it emerges as definitely from the poet's personal life as does "Le Lac" or "La Nuit d'octobre."

The poem was largely composed on or about the twenty-first of October 1837. The poet's sadness is perhaps in part a reflection of the unhappy events of that year, events which we have already narrated; it above all mirrors his mood during a trip he took alone to the valley of the Bièvre on the fifteenth or

⁶ M. Levaillant, *Tristesse d'Olympio* (Paris, Champion, 1928)

sixteenth of October. The memory of the happy hours he had spent there in 1834 and 1835 with Juliette Drouet was naturally fresh in his mind. Now in October 1837 he saw again the same landscapes, took the same walks, went to see the cottage where Juliette had stayed. He got the impression that nature had not respected the setting of his happiness, that, on the contrary, changes had occurred. This impression and the ideas expressed by Lamartine and Musset are the source of his inspiration. On the spot he composed the first draft of his poem. A few days later, in Paris, he made a few corrections and added two complete stanzas (lines 61-68) at Juliette's suggestion.

Many critics have admired the poem's strong ending, so markedly different from that of "Le Lac" and Musset's "Nuit," in which Hugo addresses nature and declares that man will remember even though nature may forget.

Ceux que vous oubliez ne vous oublieront pas

It rejects the "pathetic fallacy" of "Le Lac" and gives to man the more dignified and vigorous rôle. And nearly all critics have united in praise of the poem's high poetic quality. Brunetière, whose standards were severe and who cannot be accused of excessive partiality to Hugo, quotes several stanzas with approval

La borne du chemin, qui vit les jours sans nombre,
Où jadis pour m'attendre elle aimait à s'asseoir,
S'est usée en heurtant, lorsque la route est sombre,
Les grands chars gémissants qui reviennent le soir.

Of these particular lines he says "The more I read them, the more I admire their beauty, their sonority, their deep resonance, the ample vibration of their words." High praise, indeed, from the author of *L'Évolution de la poésie lyrique*.

Today "Tristesse d'Olympio" is so familiar to most Frenchmen who have had to study it in their youth that they are as weary of it as Americans are of Longfellow's *Psalm of Life* or

Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. It is a natural reaction but an unjust one, for "Tristesse d'Olympio" is nonetheless a great poem.

Suffering from the same overdose of popularity, "Oceano Nox" is a far shorter and less complex poem than "Tristesse d'Olympio," but it is still an important contribution to French Romantic poetry, for it effectively introduces the theme of the sea. Long before 1840 Lamartine had written of the sea, but it was the blue Mediterranean viewed as one of the *Harmonies* of friendly nature. When Hugo composed "Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne" in which he listened to the words arising from the waves, he had not yet beheld the great Atlantic. The first echo of its stormy voice is really heard in a little known poem of *Les Voix intérieures* in which the poet already visions the sailors' struggle to survive. But that poem, "Une nuit qu'on entendait la mer sans la voir," composed as a ballad and using the five-syllable line, is limited in form, scope, and vision. A beautiful composition, justly praised by Swinburne, it does not conjure up as completely as "Oceano Nox," all the men that "go down to the sea in ships," nor is the full force of the ocean felt quite so majestically. For "Oceano Nox" Hugo chose the elegiac form, more impressive and grave.

The poem draws its inspiration from direct observation and goes back, perhaps, to Hugo's first trip to the sea in 1834 when he pursued the fleeing Juliette, but more certainly to the journeys he and Juliette took to Normandy in 1835 and 1836. During his 1835 trip he wrote to Louis Boulanger his impressions of the spectacle of the sea:

At nightfall, I took a walk by the seashore, the moon was rising, the tide was coming in, fishing boats were setting out one by one . . . It was really beautiful and monstrous. The sea was desperate (*désespérée*), the moon was sinister. I have seen three very different aspects of the sea, the third was this incoming tide (*cette marée montante*) at evening.

The following year he witnessed at Saint-Valéry-en-Caux the

after-effects of a tempest which had swept in from the sea over the coast. The next day he wrote his wife: "I have just seen a wonderful spectacle: the storm which had raged all night had ended when I arrived. But the sea was still palpitating with anger. We spent eight hours looking at it. . . ." Soon after, he composed "Oceano Nox."

The symbolic title is taken from Vergil's *Æneid* (Bk. II, line 250), but Hugo avoided further imitation; he had no need, for example, of the gods of classical antiquity to embellish his poem. Recalling doubtless that page of Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* which protested against the classical distortion of nature, Hugo clearly saw that the mighty force of the ocean can be in itself a great poetic theme without the intervention of Neptune or Juno.

But the ocean is not the sole theme of "Oceano Nox." Man is equally important. Hugo had already perceived that the "majesty of human suffering," to use the phrase which Alfred de Vigny was soon to launch, is one of the great sources of literature. The tragedy of the men lost at sea, remembered for a short while by their parents and widows, and then engulfed in total oblivion becomes the central theme of the poem. It leads up to a magnificent final stanza which unites the destiny of man to the spectacle of nature.

Où sont-ils, les marins sombrés dans les nuits noires?
O flots, que vous savez de lugubres histoires!
Flots profonds redoutés des mères à genoux!
Vous vous les racontez en montant les marées,
Et c'est ce qui vous fait ces voix désespérées
Que vous avez le soir quand vous venez vers nous!

Only a great poet could write these simple and moving lines.

The last poem of *Les Rayons et les ombres* is addressed to Victor Hugo's faithful friend, Louise Bertin, and bears the title of "Sagesse." Once again the problem of religion surges up in the poet's mind. The skepticism which he had avowed in 1835 has not been wholly discarded, for there is no return to

orthodox faith But in this poem we find Hugo moving toward a clearer acceptance of a pantheistic conception of the universe. One of the voices to which he listens says to him:

Rêveur, rien n'est petit dans la création.
De l'être universel l'atome se compose,
Dieu vit un peu dans tout et rien n'est peu de chose

Here we have in germ a doctrine that will mature into the complex religious philosophy of *Les Contemplations* and *La Légende des siècles* In 1840 Hugo is satisfied with this initial expression of the unity of things From it emerges a spirit of benevolence and serenity in contrast to the troubled melancholy of 1835

Pour mon cœur où Dieu vit, où la haine s'émousse,
Sort une bienveillance universelle et douce
Qui dore comme une aube et d'avance attendrit
Le vers qu'à moitié fait j'emporte en mon esprit
Pour l'achever aux champs avec l'odeur des plaines
Et l'ombre du nuage et le bruit des fontaines

On this impressive note Victor Hugo closes not only the volume of *Les Rayons et les ombres*, but the whole cycle of his lyric poetry from 1831 to 1840

The old accusation that Victor Hugo's poetry may be admirable in form but lacking in genuine sentiment, that its imagery and meter are superior but its thought commonplace, is one of those partial truths that tend to live on in spite of the available evidence That a poem like "Napoléon II" is eloquent and brilliant but intellectually superficial few would deny That such a large poetic production — the very size of which is proof of unabated poetic power — contains inequalities, indeed weaknesses and defects, is perfectly obvious. But when allowances have been made for some hasty composition and for some superficiality of thought, when brilliances of form have been recognized (and these, let us not forget, are an asset,

though they seem to be presented by hostile critics as a liability), it remains none the less true that many poems from "Lorsque l'enfant paraît" and "Hymne" to "Tristesse d'Olympio" and "Oceano Nox" are profoundly moving compositions. They do not appeal to the eye alone; they appeal to the mind and to the heart. They are not spun merely from Hugo's imagination; they are inspired by reality. It was possible to say of many of the *Orientales* that they were completely unreal; that, however dazzling the result, they were not rooted in human experience. But of the four volumes just analyzed no such accusation can be made. Hugo's imagination, far from being unbridled, is restrained. It serves to illustrate and to embellish the observation of what is real, the analysis of what has been experienced. With few exceptions these poems are concerned with life. They are essentially human. They are not the explosions of a freakish individual, like René or Hernani. A twentieth-century reader responds to most of them as well as any member of the generation of 1830 — perhaps better. They establish Victor Hugo's reputation as a great poet, and give promise of even greater work to come. They are, in short, poems which permanently delight, console, and enrich mankind.

CHAPTER VI

MELODRAMA PLUS

Le théâtre est un lieu d'enseignement.
— Préface d' *Angelo*, V. H.

"THE aim of the dramatic poet," said Victor Hugo in the preface to *Marie Tudor*, "should always be to seek, before everything, the great, as did Corneille, or the true, as did Molière, or better still . . . to attain simultaneously the great and the true, the great in the true, the true in the great, as did Shakespeare" Hugo's obvious aspiration was that Shakespeare's achievement would be his own Yet with all his talent he failed to reach his goal. While he saw that the pitfall confronting him was the false, he fell headlong into it An analysis of his dramatic work after *Hernani* is essentially a study of his failure.

Of the six complete plays composed by Victor Hugo during the 1830's and early 1840's, three *Le Roi s'amuse*, *Ruy Blas*, and *Les Burgraves*, are in verse, the others in prose. Why this shift? In the *Préface de Cromwell*, it will be recalled, Hugo had upheld the use of alexandrines. Why did he surrender? Was it merely, as Edmond Biré insinuated, to compete with Dumas? More important reasons can easily be suggested and those put forward by Paul and Victor Glachant seem reasonable. Writing for the theater of the Porte-Saint-Martin, Hugo was addressing a less cultured audience than formerly Verse was appropriate for the Comédie Française For a theater which presented so much melodrama, as did the Porte-Saint-Martin, prose was the better medium Then, too, Hugo had begun to realize that he was speaking not merely to a public, but to the people "In our century," he says in the preface to *Angelo*, "the horizon of art has widened. Formerly, the poet

said: 'the public'; today the poet says: 'the people.' " Doubtless Hugo thought that the people would understand his prose more readily than his verse.

Hugo's change of theater, from the Comédie Française to the Porte-Saint-Martin, was caused by the difficulties provoked by *Le Roi s'amuse*, composed in three weeks from June 3 to June 23, 1832 and performed on November 22 before as brilliant, critical, and violent an audience as that which first beheld *Hernani*.¹ Thanks to Verdi's opera, *Rigoletto*, the subject of this play is well known outside of France, though certain inevitable differences exist. In *Rigoletto* the action occurs in Italy and the villain is a mere duke, in Hugo's play the action takes place in Paris and François I, King of France, is responsible for the tragedy of the buffoon, Triboulet, an embodiment, almost as sensational as Quasimodo, of Hugo's well-known doctrine of the union of the grotesque and the sublime. For Triboulet (whose historical prototype was named Fevrial) is a hunchback, perhaps not quite as hideous and repulsive as the bell-ringer of Notre-Dame, but certainly ugly to behold. Morally, he is not more attractive, for he panders to the king's vices and cynically jeers at the king's victims. At the same time he has a daughter whom he idolizes. Here, Hugo departs from historical truth, for Fevrial, the buffoon of Louis XII and François I, never had a daughter. If the poet endows Triboulet with a child, it is because the theme of paternal love is a necessary element in the play as the hunchback's redeeming feature. Yet one cannot help feeling that the poet should have chosen a more appealing figure (morally at least) to incarnate such a respectable affection, for, in spite of Triboulet's devotion to his daughter, in spite of the poet's explanation (in Act II, sc 2) of Triboulet's cynical mistreatment of other men, it is difficult to see in this otherwise evil character "something holy, august, and sacred."

¹ See the very interesting article by Jules Bertaut on "La Première de *Le Roi s'amuse*," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Nov 15, 1932)

Just as in *Hernani* the bandit and the king were in conflict, so here Triboulet and François I are antagonists. The portrait which Hugo gives us of the monarch is totally one-sided. His vices are made abundantly clear; indeed, they are grossly exaggerated. Hardly a word is uttered concerning his virtues. In *Hernani* Carlos was ultimately given the stature of an emperor. In *Le Roi s'amuse* there is no hint that François I founded the Collège Royal, gave refuge to the exiled Benvenuto Cellini, and, in general, was an important patron of the Renaissance.² Governmental censorship of such a presentation was practically inevitable. The régime of Charles X had banned *Marion de Lorme* for less. The government of Louis-Philippe, even though more liberal, was still a monarchical government. When one adds the fact that the king's assassination is advocated in the play and that there had recently been an attempt on Louis-Philippe's life, it is still clearer that censorship was inevitable. Hugo was singularly naive to expect that the government would tolerate *Le Roi s'amuse*. But he was quickly disillusioned. The first performance was no sooner ended than further performances were first suspended, and then definitely forbidden. The author brought suit against the Comédie Française before the Tribunal de Commerce in an attempt to force the theater to go on with the play. But the Tribunal de Commerce refused to intervene.

The only tangible effect of the lawsuit was to embitter Hugo's relations with the national theater which he now abandoned in favor of the Porte-Saint-Martin. There on February 2, 1833 he produced his new prose-drama, *Lucrèce Borgia*, composed in twelve days, from July 9 to July 20 of the preceding year. The rôle of this play in Hugo's private life has already been mentioned; it was during the rehearsals that Hugo became so well acquainted with Mlle Juliette who had been given the part

² History is badly distorted throughout the play. For Hugo's treatment of Saint-Vallier see the article by Maurice du Bos, "Une source des erreurs historiques du *Roi s'amuse*," *Mercure de France* (Nov. 15, 1932).

of the Princess Negroni. What concerns us now is the play itself, the prose-drama, or rather melodrama, which won such an astonishing success in 1833.

Melodrama it admittedly is, in spite of certain elements which raise it above the level of the popular melodramas of Pixérécourt and of Dumas. Stylistically, *Lucrèce Borgia* is superior to its competitors. In dramatic construction it also excels. But its characters remain essentially unreal. To be sure, *Lucrèce Borgia* differs in one important respect from the Pixérécourt heroines. She is not an innocent and virtuous young girl endangered by the machinations of an unprincipled villain. Here, as in *Marion de Lorme*, Hugo has preferred a more interesting type of heroine. Faithful to the doctrine he proclaimed in 1827 Hugo makes Lucretia Borgia a mixture of evil and good. Indeed he attributed to her far more evil than even history authorized. For the children of the real Lucretia were all born in wedlock without benefit of incest, whereas in the play Gennaro is the son of Lucretia and her own brother. She is, then, a vicious woman, endowed with the one redeeming trait of maternal love.

Doubtless Hugo thought that by mingling some good with evil he was making Lucretia (or Triboulet) a genuinely complex person, and that since human nature is admittedly complex, being neither all good nor all bad, he was creating a character which would seem true to life. He was profoundly mistaken, for this kind of complexity, devoid of any subtlety, is purely mechanical. It does not render the character more lifelike. Racine succeeds by consummate skill and the most delicate analysis in making Phedra "neither entirely guilty nor entirely innocent." He even manages, though with greater difficulty, in making Agrippina's maternal love seem credible. But in Hugo's Lucretia, there is nothing subtle. We miss those intimate reflections which persuade us of the reality of a given psychological trait. Lucretia's double nature is simplicity itself, an obvious and all too sinister simplicity.

One merit, however, cannot be denied to this play. It is a magnificent spectacle, written in a magnificent prose which is constantly reminiscent of the rhythm of Hugo's poetry.³ The curtain rises on a highly romantic setting: the terrace of the Barbarigo palace in sixteenth-century Venice, illuminated for a nocturnal festival (*une fête de nuit*), gondolas pass on the Zuecca canal visible in the background, music and moonlight add further charm to the scene. The action soon shifts to Ferrara, and takes place first outside the Borgia palace and then within the ducal palace of Este. These settings are less spectacular, though the scene in which Gennaro (Lucretia's son) is poisoned by the Duke and saved by his mother is skillfully arranged. But the high light of the play is the banquet scene of the third act in the Negroni palace. Hugo's violently anti-theatrical effects are here extraordinarily effective. The gaiety of the feast, the valor of the young men, the beauty of the women who are supping with them, are in sharp contrast to the sinister tragedy which is about to occur — and which the spectator knows will occur. Even the most rational audience might well be thrilled by the procession of the heavily hooded monks, chanting a Latin plainsong, bearing the five coffins destined to receive the revelers' bodies⁴ — a scene climaxed by the sudden apparition of Lucretia Borgia (magnificently played by Mlle Georges) who announces their fate to her victims, only to be confronted and executed by her own son. Melodrama, I repeat, but the audiences of 1833 were delirious in their applause.

Two years later Hugo turned to England for the subject matter of *Marie Tudor*. Since *Cromwell*, in which he had already "taken poetic liberties with reality,"⁵ Hugo had obviously moved farther from the conception of the historical play *Marie Tudor*, for the historian, is a complete travesty. For the lit-

³ See the article by the Duc de la Force in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Jan. 1, 1936).

⁴ This scene was suggested to Hugo by a somewhat similar one in *La Gaule poétique* of Marchangy.

⁵ The expression is Goethe's.

erary critic it is clearly a product of Hugo's imagination, influenced, to be sure, by Walter Scott, Schiller, and the Abbé Griffet. For, in spite of the fact that Victor Hugo published in 1837 a list of thirty-seven works which he consulted, Scott, Schiller, and Griffet were the principal sources. Scott's *Kenilworth* and Schiller's *Mary Stuart* gave him the notion of an English queen, as jealous and ferocious as she was passionate. The Englishman and the German were writing of Elizabeth, not of Mary. But that did not bother Hugo, he simply transfers the conception to his own heroine. He seems, indeed, to have been persuaded that Mary deserved the characterization "I have in my room," he wrote in the manuscript, "a portrait of Mary Tudor, bloody Mary ('la sanglante Marie'). She was a jealous queen, a true daughter of Henry VIII, and whose bedroom opened like her father's right on the scaffold." Such a judgment is historically unsound. Mary was a religious fanatic without, however, being as cruel as has often been charged. In any case, she was far from the profligate woman that Hugo makes her.

The genesis of Hugo's plot is to be found in Griffet's *Nouveaux éclaircissements sur Marie, fille de Henri VIII*. The Abbé's narrative, favorable to Mary, sought to defend her against the charges of her Protestant accusers. Hugo, therefore, has transformed this material according to his needs. Griffet discusses at length a supposed love affair between Mary and Courtenay.⁶ He claims that Mary had a poor opinion of Courtenay, and that Courtenay really preferred Elizabeth to her older sister. Nevertheless Mary was feminine enough to resent this preference and to look on Courtenay as an intolerable ingrate. Hugo obviously saw in this text proof of his notion that Mary was passionate, jealous, and vindictive. Instead of an Englishman he gives her an Italian for favorite. M. Blanchard, who has studied the sources of *Marie Tudor*, thinks that

⁶ There is some historical truth here. Courtenay was for a brief time a suitor for Mary's hand.

this Italian, named Fabiano Fabiani, had a historical counterpart, one Julio Cesar Brancazzo, mentioned in the *Papiers d'état* of Cardinal Granvelle. That is by no means certain; a more compelling reason for Fabiani's nationality would seem to be that an almost inviolable convention of the Romantic theater demanded that a queen's favorite should be an Italian. In any case, Mary's love for Fabiani and the latter's infidelity become the basic elements of the dramatic action

Of course Hugo has complicated matters in his customary way. There are two other characters, an orphan girl by the name of Jane, and Gilbert, a virtuous artisan who is in love with her. When Fabiani seduces Jane, Gilbert consents to become the instrument of the Queen's vengeance. Both men are finally condemned to die. The third act is devoted to the question of which one will really go to the scaffold, for Mary, repenting of her haste, now wishes to save Fabiani, and Jane (who in the meantime has been identified as Jane Talbot, the long-lost daughter of a former prominent Catholic peer) seeks desperately to save Gilbert. Hugo's manuscript shows that in the first version Fabiani was saved and Gilbert lost. But in the definitive text this is reversed. Gilbert is saved, Fabiani executed. The formula of popular melodrama is thus made to triumph, vice is punished and virtue rewarded. The cruel or, as Hugo himself called it, Aeschylian *dénouement* which had characterized his earlier plays is here abandoned in favor of the happy ending so pleasing to the crowd. But in view of the fact that *Lucrece Borgia* with all its horrors and grim ending had been so successful, it is surprising that Hugo made such a compromise. It may possibly be explained, if we accept Mr. G. B. Fitch's suggestion, by the influence of *Favras*, written by two forgotten authors, Merville and Sauvage, and performed in May 1831 at the Théâtre de la Gaîté. This drama dealt, to be sure, with the French Revolution, but its *dénouement* is structurally similar to that of *Marie Tudor*.

Mention should be made of the resemblance between Alexan-

dre Dumas' *Christine* and *Marie Tudor*. In the former *Christine* is in love with the Italian Monaldeschi, and her jealousy is aroused by the discovery that, while making love to her, he is also making love to Paula. But there was really no plagiarism here. Hugo's own fertile imagination and the texts of Scott and Griffet are the indubitable sources of *Marie Tudor*. Nevertheless the resemblance between the two plays probably contributed to the growing coolness between the two authors. Dumas had recently been irritated by a hostile article in the *Journal des débats* and thought that Hugo, as a close friend of Bertin, the editor, might have prevented its publication. The whole affair was unfortunate, but Dumas' enmity was not to be of long duration. He was too good natured to bear a grudge. In 1837 Hugo helped close the breach by using his influence to obtain for the author of *Christine* the coveted Legion of Honor.

Meanwhile, Hugo had written and produced yet another melodrama, *Angelo, tyran de Padoue* (April 28, 1835). It was accepted by the Comédie Française to which Hugo now returned. Mlle Mars, who had played Doña Sol in 1830, was cast for the part of Tisbe, the warm-hearted but profligate courtesan. Hugo determined to give the other part, that of the respectably married Catarina, to Marie Dorval, fresh from her triumph as Kitty Bell in Vigny's *Chatterton*. Mlle Georges was hardly considered, for she had not been as successful in *Marie Tudor* as in *Lucrèce Borgia*. She had, moreover, become extremely fat. So the part of Catarina went, without further ado, to Marie Dorval. In spite of the hostility between the two actresses — for Mlle Mars looked on Dorval as a young upstart — they managed to make the play successful. Like Hugo's preceding dramas, it is a horribly complicated action in which the respectable Catarina is finally saved by the immoral Tisbe from a jealous husband and the death to which he has condemned her. The hero of the play is Rodolfo who has been called by Professor Draper the "mystery-man par excellence"

of the Romantic theater. "Deep down in my life," Rodolfo exclaims, "is a secret known to me alone." This secret is nevertheless discovered to be his love for Catarina, whom without the aid of the courtesan he would have irrevocably lost. But it is needless to unravel further the complicated plot with all its romantic claptrap. We find the usual secret doors, rare poisons, sleeping potions, daggers, mysterious keys to which the Romantic theater was all too addicted. *Angelo*, in spite of its defects, was a moderate success.

Three years later an event occurred in Paris which was symptomatic of an approaching change in popular taste, though, as Professor Draper says, few at the time realized its importance. On June 13, 1838, the Comédie-Française staged a classical revival. Corneille's *Horace* was chosen and the rôle of Camille was entrusted to a new young actress, Mlle Rachel. She won immediate success, and she was destined to have a brilliant dramatic career. We know now that her appearance "hastened the decline of the Romantic drama."

But Hugo, undisturbed, or, as is more likely, unconscious of any change of taste, continued in the same path which he had trod so far. He was indeed to achieve one more triumph before the inevitable failure arrived. This last triumph was *Ruy Blas*, first produced at the Théâtre de la Renaissance (Salle Ventadour) on November 8, 1838.

The play is considered by most critics to be Hugo's best. Written in a magnificent verse, to which the author significantly returned, its subject matter and tone seem far more elevated, far more serious, far more worthy of critical attention than *Marie Tudor* and *Angelo*.

The original idea of the play, as Professor Lancaster has pretty clearly established, was "that of a minister's fall from power under very dramatic circumstances." In other words, the situation at the end of the third act when Salluste most inopportunately returns and imposes his will on Ruy Blas was probably the initial conception to which, of course, Hugo added many other elements. Foremost was the love of a lackey for

a queen which, according to a tempting legend difficult to kill because it is equally difficult wholly to deny, was suggested by Hugo's admiration for the Duchess of Orléans. But this element of the plot is closely linked to another: the treachery of Don Salluste who, in order to trap the woman responsible for his own downfall, causes his valet, Ruy Blas, to take the place of Don César de Bazan and orders him to make love to the Queen of Spain.

All this sounds at first glimpse like the customary incredible plot of which Hugo was so fond and in which his own personality might be to some extent projected. But in this case the plot is not as improbable as it sounds and is less personal than legend would have it. Both literature and history furnish sources that explain the construction of the play more satisfactorily than does Hugo's private life. Among the historical cases of sudden elevations to power and sudden falls from those dizzy heights Hugo was doubtless struck by the case of Fernando de Valenzuela, of humble origin, who, in seventeenth-century Spain, after becoming the favorite of the Regent Maria-Anna, was made a marquis, and even minister of the state, only to be overthrown by a cabal and deported to the Philippines. A literary source with a similar situation was that of Gailardet's *Struensée*, published in 1833. The love motif may have been originally suggested by the *Confessions* of Rousseau. Jean-Jacques, it will be remembered, while a laquais in the house of the Comte de Gouvion, was attracted by the Count's granddaughter, Mlle de Breil. There is some evidence that Hugo was greatly impressed by that narrative. A more likely source, according to the late Professor Lanson, is the real story of the Swiss artist, Angelica Kauffmann, who was deceived into marrying an unscrupulous adventurer, the false Count de Horn, this scheme for vengeance having been arranged by a rejected suitor. A French writer, Léon de Wailly, novelized this material early in 1838, and Victor Hugo was undoubtedly familiar with it.

Politics, vengeance, and love constitute then the essential

framework of the drama. In other words, the career of Ruy Blas, the vengeance of Don Salluste, and the love of Ruy Blas and the Queen are the great mainsprings of the dramatic action. As for the general atmosphere of his play Hugo borrowed it from history. Here, as the studies of Morel Fatio have revealed, he used two principal works, the *État présent de l'Espagne* by the Abbé de Vayrac (Paris 1718, 3 vols.) and the *Mémoires de la cour d'Espagne* by the Comtesse d'Aulnoy (Paris 1690, 2 vols.) Moreover, he used them with discretion and skill, with the result that he has presented an arresting picture of the Spanish court at the end of the seventeenth century. "Never," says Levaillant, "never has a drama been more faithful to the general spirit of an epoch, nor has one ever better reconstituted its atmosphere." From this point of view, *Ruy Blas* is, perhaps, superior to *Hernani*, though the earlier play did give an impression of Spanish vigor at the advent of Charles the Fifth. Taken together, the two plays, as Hugo himself proclaimed in the preface, evoke two important moments in Spanish history.

Between *Hernani* and *Ruy Blas* [he wrote] two centuries of Spain are framed, two centuries which Providence — a remarkable thing — has not wanted to lengthen by an hour, for Charles the Fifth was born in 1500 and Charles II died in 1700. These great appearances of dynasties which now and again illuminate history are for the author a beautiful and melancholy spectacle on which his eyes are often fixed. He sometimes tries to transport something of them into his works. Thus he has sought to fill *Hernani* with the radiance of a dawn and to cover *Ruy Blas* with the shadow of a twilight. In *Hernani*, the sun of the house of Austria rises, in *Ruy Blas* it sets.

For once, Hugo came close to attaining that greatness — *le grand* — which he had proclaimed to be one of the essential aims of the dramatic poet.

Much, then, is to be said in favor of *Ruy Blas*. For not only does it present this colorful picture of a declining national glory, but, like *Hernani*, it contains some admirable poetry.

There is, for example, Ruy Blas's monologue in the third scene of the first act. He has just met Don César, whom he knows only under the name of Zafari, and he recalls their youth in very beautiful and moving lines. Then there is the famous diatribe of the third act in which Ruy Blas, now Prime Minister, thanks to the Queen, denounces the corrupt councillors, paints a magnificent picture of the decadence of Spain, and calls on the shade of Charles V for guidance and help. Again, in the third act, there is the lyrical declaration of Ruy Blas's love for the Queen and the expression of his ecstasy when he learns that his love is not unrequited

Cet ange, qu'à genoux je contemple et je nomme,
D'un mot me transfigure et me fait plus qu'un homme.
Donc je marche vivant dans mon rêve étoilé

"An ardent and gentle poetry," says Levaillant, whom I again quote with approval, "emanates from the rôles of Ruy Blas and the queen united by a chaste and Cornelian love"

Furthermore, Hugo has been more successful in this play than elsewhere in introducing a humorous note. The character of Don César de Bazan, his picaresque career, his gaiety, his mishaps, his adventures in the mysterious house of Don Salluste in the fourth act, all make an important contribution to this humorous effect. Hugo had clearly not forgotten his famous doctrine of the *Préface de Cromwell*.

Such are some of the genuine qualities of the play. Yet when all is said and done, one's final judgment cannot be entirely favorable. Though melodrama is perhaps less blatantly present here, it is none the less perceptible. The characters are doubtless more impressive than in the prose-dramas just discussed, but they seem nevertheless essentially unreal. Certainly Salluste is very close to the villain of popular melodrama. Certainly Ruy Blas is as much an *homme fatal* as Hernani. Certainly the Queen resembles the conventional romantic heroine far more than she does a real woman of flesh and blood. And

in spite of the undoubtedly authentic sources, one of the basic elements of the plot, the love of a lackey and a queen, seems quite unbelievable. It well illustrates the frequent assertion that some events in life are dangerous to use in fiction. The exceptional is with difficulty made credible.

The cycle of Victor Hugo's plays is now almost terminated. One drama, *Les Jumeaux*, was partly written in 1839 but, for a variety of reasons, was never completed and, of course, never produced.⁷ Several years elapsed before the poet offered the public his fifth play in verse, *Les Burgraves*, that ill-starred composition which led him to renounce the theater for many a year. Some details of the play were perhaps suggested by Népomucène Lemerrier's *Clovis*⁸ or by *Le Tribunal secret* of Léon Thiessé,⁹ but a more important source of inspiration is to be found in Hugo's trip along the Rhine (an event which we shall discuss in another chapter). In spite of undeniable beauties, the play was doomed to failure, for the public in this thirteenth year of Louis-Philippe's reign was growing weary of Romantic melodramas, and was turning with pleasure to those classical revivals of Mlle Rachel already mentioned.

The subject of *Les Burgraves* centers on the conflict between Frederick Barbarossa and the medieval lords of the Rhineland, "les formidables barons du Rhin." That aspect of the play with its epic vision won the acclaim of some of the contemporary critics. Théophile Gautier, for instance wrote:

What marvelous power was needed to revivify this whole epoch which has vanished in the obscurity of a dubious past, to reconstruct this world of granite inhabited by bronze giants, to rebuild stone by stone, with the patience of a medieval architect, this inaccessible and formidable citadel with its walls containing gloomy passages, with its

⁷ P. Berret, "L'Affaire des Jumeaux," *Mercur de France* (Feb. 15, 1934).

⁸ P. Moreau, "Une source possible des Burgraves," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1929).

⁹ A. Debidour, "Une source probable des Burgraves," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1933).

dungeons full of mysteries and terrors, with its old family portraits, with its suits of armor giving forth strange sounds when the wind lightly blows upon them and which seem still to enclose the souls of those bodies they once clad! . . . To maintain this epic tone, this splendid lyrical outburst for three long acts is a task which only Victor Hugo could accomplish today

Gautier was a partial critic, but Charles Magnin, writing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, expressed a similar admiration

Unfortunately the subject becomes fantastic in the extreme, for the man we thought to be the Emperor miraculously resurrected at the age of eighty, turns out to be (in the last act, of course) Donato, the brother of the Burgrave Job. A conflict between brothers, originally caused by love of the same girl, is superimposed on the larger, impersonal subject. While the first conflict is impressive, the second is merely melodramatic. And never in the play does Hugo succeed in welding properly the two types. The melodramatic details ruin the epic passages which in themselves are frequently of great power and beauty, the best known being the seventh scene of Part I in which the Emperor appears as a beggar at his brother's castle of Heppenhoff. Job's speech of welcome and the beggar's reply are justly celebrated.

Les Burgraves, in short, illustrates admirably a general conclusion which we must formulate concerning all of Victor Hugo's dramatic work. While he possessed genuine dramatic sense, while he revealed a capacity for situation, for dialogue, for staging, he was nevertheless essentially a poet gone astray in the theater. His best plays are beyond any question those written in verse, they are better in part just because they are written in verse. Even the worst of them is superior to the prose-dramas, particularly *Marie Tudor* and *Angelo* which need the luster of Hugo's poetry to give them literary distinction.

But, of course, Hugo's great weakness throughout his theater lies in his presentation of human character. His men and women have all the defects of the Romantic conception. They are pic-

turesque, often mysterious, nearly always violent, superficially interesting; they are practically without exception — I refer naturally to the principal characters — unreal. Their unreality has ruined the effectiveness of the plays for all but the ultra-Romantic reader or spectator

Two things of importance Hugo did accomplish in the history of the French theater. As we saw in an earlier chapter, he almost single-handed broke down the rigidity of some of the classical rules. In the second place, he formulated with great force the conception of the "useful" theater. While he protested (in the preface to *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*) against any *direct utility* of art, claiming that drama has everything to lose by taking sides in momentary political or social conflicts, nevertheless he asserted (in the preface to *Angelo*) that "today, more than ever, the theater is a place for teaching (un lieu d'enseignement)." Of course he added that the theater must also amuse, interest, and move. But to be complete, it must have the "will to teach" (la volonté d'enseigner) as well as the "will to please" (la volonté de plaire). Hugo wanted the theater to teach in the manner of Shakespeare or Molière rather than in the manner of Voltaire, but he insisted on the necessity of a great moral purpose. In this fashion Hugo helped to prepare the way, in spite of his reservations, for the "useful" theater of Alexandre Dumas *fils* and Émile Augier.

CHAPTER VII

ACADEMICIAN AND PEER OF FRANCE

M. Victor Hugo est nommé pair
de France: *le Roi s'amuse!*

— CH MAURICE

DURING the ten years devoted to the poetry and drama discussed in the last two chapters Victor Hugo found time to interest himself in political and social questions. We have seen that he acclaimed the Revolution of July both in verse and prose. In August 1831 he repeated his opinion in the preface to *Marion de Lorme*, calling the events of the preceding year "une grande secousse d'affranchissement et d'émancipation" But hardly had he penned these words when he received a call from an emissary of Joseph Bonaparte The ex-king of Spain, who had been living in the United States for fifteen years, was also interested in the events of 1830 He hoped that the position of Louis-Philippe was insecure and that an imperial restoration might be possible Not that he aspired to the throne himself. The candidate he supported was Napoleon's son, the Duke of Reichstadt, a volatile but engaging young man Joseph naturally included the son of General Leopold Hugo in the list of names which he confided to Joel Roberts Poinsett, the well-known South Carolinian, who for reasons of health abandoned his American political activities for a brief time in 1831 and took a trip to Europe Hugo saw Poinsett in Paris in early September, for he wrote to Joseph on the 6th:

I have seen Mr Poinnett [*sic*] He gave me the impression of being a man of real distinction I talked with him openly He will tell you of my hopes, of my wishes, of all my thoughts

It is because I am devoted to France, to liberty, that I believe in the future of your royal nephew He can be of great service to his

country If he were to give, as I do not doubt he would, the guarantee required by the ideas of emancipation, of progress, and of liberty, no one would rally to this new order of things more cordially and more zealously than I, and with me, sire, I can answer for it, all the rising generation in France, which venerates the name of the emperor, and on which, obscure as I am, I perhaps have some influence

This was Bonapartism of the most outspoken sort, forecast by the eloquent stanzas of the 1827 "Ode à la colonne" and even more by "Lui" in *Les Orientales*. Nor was it in any sense treachery to the new régime, for Hugo was as yet far from committed to the support of Louis-Philippe

Joseph Bonaparte, convinced by this and other reports that an imperial restoration was not impossible, sailed on July 20, 1832 for England where he proposed to organize the Bonapartist forces But fate intervened. The young Duke of Reichstadt died in Vienna only two days after his uncle's embarkation It was the end of the immediate hopes of Joseph Bonaparte and Victor Hugo The latter, to be sure, had the consolation of poetry He composed the brilliant ode, "Napoléon II,"¹ first published in the *Livre des cent et un* and later in *Les Chants du crépuscule*

The next few years are not marked by any political action on Hugo's part But he continued to give a good deal of thought to political and social questions. In 1834 he wrote a highly eulogistic essay on Mirabeau and published, as we have seen, *Claude Gueux* He showed in his poems and plays his interest in political and social problems In this year of 1834 his old friend Lamennais published the *Paroles d'un croyant* which certainly tended to reinforce Hugo's idealism and revealed to him, as Professor Hunt says, "the attractions of that socialistic language that he will like to use in the future."² The Saint-Simonists apparently had little specific influence on him. Even during the period of his close association with

¹ See page 91

² H. J. Hunt, *Le Socialisme et le romantisme en France, étude de la presse socialiste de 1830 à 1848* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 247-248

Sainte-Beuve he did not follow his friend into the Saint-Simonist camp.³ While he shared their general humanitarianism, as well as their belief in the progress of man toward perfection and their concept of God as infinite, universal love, Hugo remained aloof from their economic doctrines. The truth is that the poet had as yet fixed upon no specific solution for the social problems of his time. "Tout est défait; rien n'est refait," he complained in the *Étude sur Mirabeau*. But he proposed nothing to fill that void. Two years later, when that extraordinary person, Émile de Girardin, founded *La Presse*, Hugo wrote for him the political and social program of the new paper, a document which reveals a moderate, vague, almost conservative liberalism.

It was the marriage of the Duke of Orleans (whose acquaintance Hugo had made in 1834) to the Princess Helen of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1837 that really opened new political possibilities to the poet. He understood from the urgency of the invitation he received to the great banquet at Versailles and the way he was welcomed there that, whatever the attitude of Louis-Philippe might be, the Duke and Duchess were eager to win him to the support of their régime. He was seated at the Duc d'Aumale's table. He was of course presented to the Duchess who talked to him at length, expressing her admiration for his work, and reporting to him a flattering conversation she had had with Goethe concerning him. Three weeks later Hugo was promoted to the rank of officer of the Legion of Honor. All this was more than clear, and it must be admitted that Hugo rose to the bait with alacrity.

Yet these attentions did not prevent Hugo from composing and publishing *Le Retour de l'Empereur* in December 1840. The occasion was the transfer of Napoleon's ashes from Saint Helena to Paris. And this inspired Hugo to write:

³ Sainte-Beuve and Pierre Leroux published in January 1831 a Saint-Simonist *Profession de foi* in *Le Globe*. Sainte-Beuve's Saint-Simonism was of short duration.

Toi, héros de ces funérailles,
 Roi! génie! empereur! martyr!
 Les temps sont clos! dans nos murailles
 Rentre pour ne plus en sortir!
 Rentre aussi dans ta gloire entière!
 Toi qui mêlât d'une main frère,
 Dans l'airain de ton œuvre altière
 Tous les peuples, tous les métaux!

The text shows clearly enough the poet's admiration for the victor of Austerlitz. It was republished after many years in the *Légende des siècles*.

Undaunted by this new outburst of Bonapartism on the part of his protégé, the Duke of Orleans lent his support to Hugo's candidacy to the French Academy. The great poet had been thrice rejected, twice in 1836, and again in the winter of 1839 to 1840. These failures only stimulated his ambition. As Juliette Drouet put it with a touch of malice: "Toto court après l'Académie à en perdre ses guêtres." As a matter of fact "Toto's" campaign was more skillful than this remark implies. In the first place his home in the Place Royale (now the Place des Vosges) where he had been living since 1831 was a social center of considerable brilliance. Prominent literary men like Gautier, Banville, Gérard de Nerval, and Balzac came there. Lesser writers, such as Auguste Vacquerie and Paul Meurice (who were also, as it happens, wealthy men) became his faithful adherents. Artists, men of science, representatives from the press and from politics were seen there together with their wives or fiancées. On one famous occasion the Duke and Duchess of Orleans favored the poet with their presence. Théodore de Banville has written of Hugo's reception in his memoirs:

In the rear salon, around an enormous bank of flowers were seated the young women, beautiful, smiling, magnificently dressed, happy to be at the great poet's, and there Mme Hugo did the honors with her sovereign grace.

Then came the large salon where a crowd of men and women not

one of whom was banal or mediocre moved about. . . The two manteled fireplaces at each end, decorated with rare mirrors and golden candlesticks, the immense curtains of red damask, the antique furniture, lent great character to the room, and the window recesses were so wide and deep that each one became a kind of little salon where one could avoid the throng and talk freely. In the dining-room, ornamented with old armor, there was a still greater crowd, and one saw there men who have become famous, then young and eager, coming and going, sometimes writing or sketching in their open albums.

In the summertime particularly, it was charming. The great door of the apartment remained open, the perfume of flowers and foliage came in through the windows, and the party spread to the Place Royale, for the young men went to smoke their cigarettes in the paths around the statue of Louis the Chaste, then returned, intoxicated with the night, the deep blue dome of heaven, into the dazzling light of the torches and of fair ladies who seemed like goddesses.⁴

Amid his brilliantly attired guests Hugo himself stood forth in his dark frock coat and gray trousers. He shone rather by the charm of his personality and the exquisite courtesy from which he never deviated.

But if Victor Hugo received at the Place Royale, he did not fail to sally forth to the conquest of Parisian society. The Legitimist *faubourg* Saint-Germain was doubtless closed to him but the various salons of the Orleanist Chaussée-d'Antin welcomed him with pleasure. For not only was he obviously well thought of at court, not only was he an eminent poet, playwright, and novelist, but he had a charming personality. All of Hugo's contemporaries testified to his dazzling conversation. He was interested in everything: history, art, literature, science. And he talked about them all with vivacity, with eloquence, with authority, even with wit. For in conversation he sometimes found the amusing remark or nuance which his written work largely lacks. With all these qualities Hugo was a great social success. Mme d'Agoult's doors were always open.

⁴Th. de Banville, *Mes Souvenirs* (Paris, Charpentier, 1882). This quotation is also found in R. Escholier, *Victor Hugo raconté par ceux qui l'ont vu* (Paris, Stock, 1931).

to him. He appeared often at the receptions of Mme de la Bourdonnaye. He dined every week at the house of Astolphe de Custine. He was naturally one of the habitués of Delphine de Girardin's salon, and the beautiful and witty Delphine supported his candidacy with enthusiasm. A new vacancy occurred in 1840 with the death of Népomucène Lemer cier who had been one of his principal adversaries. Hugo was chosen by a vote of 17 to 15. He doubtless owed his election in part to the influence of the Duke of Orleans who had spoken to Count Molé in his behalf. The previous rejections had, of course, been a scandal, for the men elected (Dupaty, Mignet, and Flourens) were far inferior in literary talent.

Hugo pronounced his *Discours de réception* on June 3, 1841. For the first time the royal family graced such an event with their presence — another signal honor. They listened, moreover, to an extraordinary speech. It began with an eloquent tribute to Napoleon, to his achievements, to his glory. It admitted, however, his tyranny, resisted only by a handful of literary men and women, among whom Hugo was able to include his predecessor, Népomucène Lemer cier. There followed the customary eulogy. Hugo then turned to the question of the importance of tradition in France, and in this section of his speech he was able to praise the Revolution of July which placed on the throne a representative of a great tradition, thus transforming "into a young dynasty, an old family, monarchical and popular at once, full of the past through its history and full of the future through its mission." For its mission, Hugo went on to say, was to allow and supervise that liberal expansion necessary to the life the country. If Hugo had been seduced by the Duke and Duchess, he did not propose to be entirely submissive, and he consequently insisted on pointing out the road which he deemed it essential for the state to follow. If it was not a road of further revolution, neither was it a road of reaction. He made that abundantly clear. At the same time his own personal road was also revealed by this speech, which

gives us the piquant picture of a Bonapartist coming to rest in the Orleanist camp.

If the *Discours de réception* was not a political act, certainly Hugo's next publication must be considered one. On January 28, 1842 his publishers placed on sale two volumes entitled *Le Rhin, Lettres à un ami*.⁵ The work is, on the one hand, a magnificent travel-book and, on the other, a program of international politics. The travelogue was inspired by journeys made by Hugo and Juliette in 1839 and 1840 up and down the Rhine. The international program was intended to launch the author as a political thinker of importance.

Rivers stimulated Hugo's mind and imagination. "Like mighty trumpeters," he wrote, "rivers sing to the ocean of the beauty of the land, the cultivation of the fields, the splendor of the cities, the glory of men." But this river, the Rhine, seemed particularly significant. Not far off, at Aix-la-Chapelle, was the tomb of Charlemagne of which Hugo had written in *Hernani* and which he now visited as soon as he arrived at Aix. At Cologne there rose one of the beautiful medieval cathedrals. At Andernach he came upon a monument commemorating the grave of Hoche. At Strasbourg, the Minster, with its spire at once "gigantic and delicate," aroused his most enthusiastic eloquence. Mainz, Worms, Reichenberg, Falkenburg, Heidelberg, Basle, Zurich, with their ancient buildings, their landscapes, their legends, all appeared before the readers of 1842 in pages which richly deserve to be read a hundred years later. The Rhine was, in truth, as Hugo exclaimed, "a noble river, feudal, republican, imperial, worthy of being at once French and German."

The Rhine not only inspired these sparkling descriptions (and some very interesting water colors and sketches⁶) but also the central idea in the long Conclusion which outlined the author's interpretation of the past two hundred years of Euro-

⁵ The friend was Louis Boulanger.

⁶ See R. Escholier, *Victor Hugo artiste* (Paris, Crès, 1926).

pean history and gave his views on the destiny of France on the European continent. This central idea is that Europe needs, for its proper equilibrium, "two great states of the Rhine, both made fertile and closely united by this regenerating river; the one, northern and eastern, Germany . . . the other, southern and western, France . . ." Collaboration between the two states would check the power of England and Russia; it would mean "the salvation of Europe and the peace of the world." But Hugo maintained that such a policy required that the left bank of the Rhine should go to France. As he recognized that Prussia was unlikely to agree to it, he recommended that Prussia be given Hanover in exchange. Another obstacle to the program, he thought, was the fear aroused in the rest of Europe by French ideas of freedom and equality. He, therefore, urged his compatriots to move slowly in the path of freedom.

This three-point program. return of the left bank of the Rhine to France, collaboration with a strongly organized Germany in central Europe, appeasement of Europe by judicious restraint of French radicalism, was clearly anti-British and anti-Russian. The fervent lover of Shakespeare was obviously no admirer of Palmerston. A limited Anglomania on the literary front — limited because Hugo's knowledge hardly extended beyond Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron — was thus balanced by a vehement Anglophobia on the political front. It derived, this Anglophobia, in part from Hugo's admiration for Napoleon, in part from his new relations with the Duke of Orleans and his German wife neither of whom could be accused of Anglomania, in part from the anti-French policy of Palmerston, a policy which in 1840 had isolated France in a diplomatic crisis over the Near East, had almost participated war between the two countries, and had aroused much anti-British and anti-German feeling. It was during this crisis of 1840-41 that Lamartine published his famous "Marseillaise de la paix" in reply to provocative stanzas composed by a German poet named Becker, and that Alfred de Musset wrote his nationalistic poem,

"Le Rhin allemand," partly in protest against the pacificism expressed in Lamartine's text. Edgar Quinet also protested against the "Marseillaise de la paix" in a poem called simply "Le Rhin," published by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Victor Hugo was now contributing his word, not in verse like Musset and Lamartine, but in grave and weighty prose. He apparently did not realize that Louis-Philippe was as determined to avoid war with England as with Prussia and that such an essay, however pleasing to the Duchess of Orleans, was little calculated to advance him in the King's opinion. And, then, he was dogged by the bad luck which had already ruined one set of political hopes. In 1832 death had removed the Duke of Reichstadt with dramatic unexpectedness, in 1842 death intervened to remove the Duke of Orleans. On March 13 the horses pulling his carriage got out of hand and when the Duke tried to jump to safety, he was so severely injured that within a few hours he died. Once again Hugo's hopes were dashed, especially as any future regency was confided, not to the Duchess in whose esteem the poet stood so high, but to the Duke of Nemours who was quite indifferent to Hugo's aspirations.

Yet all was not lost, for the Duchess exerted her influence to bring the King and the poet closer together, and Louis-Philippe himself knew from observation of previous reigns how troublesome literary men can be when they are allowed to go over to the opposition. Soon, too, the King's human sympathies were aroused by the personal tragedy which overwhelmed Victor Hugo in September of the same year.

In February Victor Hugo had married off his favorite daughter Léopoldine. The groom was Charles Vacquerie and the marriage was celebrated at Saint Paul's church. Seven months later they were both dead, victims of a boating accident, September 4, 1843, on the Seine at Caudebec near Villequier. Victor Hugo was far away when the tragedy occurred. He had left Paris in mid-July, and, accompanied as usual by Juliette Drouet, was visiting the region of the French and Spanish

Pyrenees. He apparently had during the night of September 4-5 a presentiment of tragedy, for obsessed by the notion of death he jotted down some verses beginning with the line: *O Mort! mystère obscur! sombre nécessité!* On September 8 in the village of Soubise he read in a daily newspaper the report of his daughter's drowning. It took him four terrible days to reach Paris where the presence of the rest of his family and of many friends was unable to assuage his profound grief. In these first moments a few beautiful lines of poetry were confided to his manuscripts, but it was a year before the great poems were composed in any coherent form. They were to be published over a decade later in *Les Contemplations* of 1856. We shall discuss them in a later chapter.

Hugo's tragic loss must have won the sympathy of Louis-Philippe who had so recently undergone a similar experience. The widowed Duchess of Orleans was still eager that the poet receive greater official recognition. On April 13, 1845, the third anniversary of the Duke's death, Victor Hugo was named a Peer of France. His first great political ambition was thus realized. Sworn in on April 28 he took his seat in that House which mingled, as Lacretelle rather aptly says, "the most illustrious chiefs of aristocratic families with representatives of the new bourgeois feudality."⁷ The republicans of the period who had entertained some hope of winning the poet to their party were caustic in their condemnation. Armand Marrast said in the *National* "Salute Viscount Hugo, Peer of France! Democracy which he has insulted can henceforth laugh, she is well avenged." Charles Maurice made the comment which serves as the epigraph for this chapter. The Saint-Simonists were completely alienated and during the remainder of Louis-Philippe's reign looked on Hugo as a renegade. But, rather oddly, the Fourierists continued to be friendly. The reason seems to be that many of them felt that a monarchy would be as favorable to the realization of their dreams as a democratic or republican régime. They had always liked Hugo's idealization of woman,

⁷ P. de Lacretelle, *Vie politique de V. Hugo* (Paris, Hachette, 1928), p. 45

especially the fallen woman rehabilitated through love; they liked his sympathy for the working classes and his aspiration for universal peace. So they praised his appointment as Peer of France.

Juliette Drouet appears to have been unenthusiastic. Not that she openly condemned this ambition, but less skillful in her relations with Hugo than usual, she seems to have been, if not overtly amused, at least unimpressed. Perhaps she was too worried to experience any genuine pleasure over this event. For some time now her Toto had been much less attentive. Oh, there were plenty of letters. Birthdays, anniversaries were punctually observed. She had accompanied him, as we have seen, to the Pyrenees. But in Paris his visits had been and still were rare. What was the cause? Was it merely the social whirl? After the death of Léopoldine it could hardly be that. She did not really know. Nevertheless, her anxiety was not unfounded. Though she knew it not, she had a rival.

It was Léonie Biard, the young and very beautiful wife of the court painter, François Biard. Hugo had met her at the salon of Mme Fortunée Hamelin late in 1842. In the spring of 1843 he had been one of the guests at a costume party offered by Mme Biard and her husband at their estate, the Plâtreries. In December the poet and Léonie were lovers, brought together by their troubles. The poet was still stricken, of course, by the death of his daughter. Mme Biard, unable to tolerate longer the jealousies and the moods of an irritable husband, had decided to ask for a legal separation. In those circumstances she became Hugo's mistress.

The following year, their liaison brought them nothing but happiness, as a number of Hugo's poems discreetly indicate. Alone, Juliette, unaware of the situation, suffered from her solitude. At the end of December 1844 she could not help reproaching her lover.

For literally more than two months I have not set foot in the street, if I except the day when we went together to buy a lamp. On the other hand, I can't agree to go out at midnight in this weather. You

have acquired the habit of coming to see me at one or two o'clock in the morning . . . What can I do? Suffer, always suffer from this horrible torture which no one sees, which no one pities . . . You alone, oh God, know what strength and courage I need to endure this new kind of sequestration . . . There are moments when it weighs down on me like a stone cover and when I'd be capable of anything for a little air and liberty

Yet no suspicion of the real truth crossed her mind.

If Juliette was free of suspicion, François Biard was not. He concluded that some man — he thought some actor — was behind his wife's request for a separation, and he had her followed. On July 2, 1845 Victor Hugo and Léonie Biard were surprised by the painter and the police *en flagrant délit* in a hotel room. Hugo had to invoke his new title to avoid arrest (As a Peer he was answerable only to the Peers) Mme Biard had no such protection and was unceremoniously thrown into the prison of Saint Lazare.

The uproar in Paris can easily be imagined . . . Newspapers hostile to the poet took pleasure in reporting the escapade and discomfiture of "an illustrious person who combines the laurels of Parnassus and the ermine mantle of the Peerage." No code-book was required to decipher this statement, the identity was immediately clear . . . And Hugo's personal enemies were no more reticent than *Le National* . . . Sainte-Beuve with unconcealed satisfaction wrote to a friend "As for me, I merely say what I have often said about him in connection with his last works: it's clumsy and it's clumsily done" . . . Hugo's friends, on the other hand, were not unkind, though some, like Lamartine, could not help being a little witty at his expense. For if the author of *Jocelyn* wrote: "The amorous adventure of my poor friend Hugo grieves me. . . . What must be heart-breaking for him, is to know that this poor woman is in prison while he is free," he also said in another letter "France is elastic; one rises even from a divan "

Meanwhile Mme Biard languished in jail and her husband

prepared to bring suit before the Peers. As the scandal would have been enormous and embarrassing to the government, the King intervened. He ordered Hugo to take a trip to Spain, and he persuaded Biard to drop his plans for a suit against the poet. Hugo, instead of going to Spain, concealed himself at Juliette's. Her solitude was now ended. Incredible as it may seem, she was still unaware of the episode, so complete was her sequestration, so isolated was she from society.

Adèle, of course, had to know the truth. Hugo recognized that fact from the start, and the story that he confessed to her by kneeling dramatically before her and asking her pardon is perhaps basically true. She appears to have taken the episode fairly philosophically.

As for Mme Biard, she could not hope to get off quite as easily as a Peer of France. After two months her husband was persuaded by Mme Hamelin to release his wife from prison, but he forced her to go to a convent where she was to do penance for six months. In the meantime he had obtained a separation and the custody of his children. Hugo worked diligently to spare the poor woman any further publicity. In this he succeeded, perhaps beyond his expectations. Concerning the trial before the Tribunal de la Seine the press kept silence.

Such was the immediate dénouement. But what were the after events? It appears certain that Mme Biard, fortunately for her taken under the protection of Mme Hamelin, continued to see and to correspond with Victor Hugo, remaining in short, his mistress. She even entered the poet's domicile — at his invitation — and became to some extent a friend of Mme Hugo. After several years, persuaded that she alone was the poet's true love, Léonie committed the indelicacy of revealing the facts to Juliette by sending her a packet of Hugo's letters. Then for the first time the poet's prematurely white-haired mistress learned of her rival. She immediately offered to withdraw, but Hugo was too honorable to accept. He romantically proposed a period of trial during which he should continue to

see both women. At the end love would pronounce the verdict. Juliette agreed to this arrangement, but ere long fate intervened, for events as yet unrelated forced the poet into exile from his native land. With the unwitting help of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, Juliette ultimately triumphed over her younger rival

Hugo had certainly departed widely from those standards of Christian morality to which he had been so conspicuously faithful in his youth. Like George Sand and like the Fourierists he doubtless held that union between man and woman should be voluntary and that when it ceases to be voluntary, it ceases to be noble. Love, not the conventional tie of marriage, is the important thing. So, partly liberated by this Romanticism, he had become more and more pagan. But was there any other influence? Some students of his life and work hold there was; they are persuaded that Hugo was moved in the direction of paganism less by Romanticism than by his absorption in occult doctrines.

About 1836 Victor Hugo had made the acquaintance of the brilliant occultist, Alexandre Weill, who says in his memoirs that "Hugo became fond of me from our very first interview and presented me even to his mistresses." The two men saw a good deal of each other, and beyond any doubt Weill expounded to Hugo the doctrines of occult philosophers, doctrines such as the divinity of sensuality, the existence of elect beings or magi, and the reincarnation and transmigration of souls. That these ideas interested Hugo profoundly is unquestionable. It is, therefore, possible, though in the opinion of the present writer not probable, that his progressively greater paganism is attributable to this source. The thesis of occult influence would be more impressive if Hugo's evolution were otherwise inexplicable. But it is by no means uncommon for men to be puritanical in youth and pagan in their maturity.

The scandal of 1845 momentarily thrust Hugo's political ambitions into the background. It was nearly a year before

he dared to open his mouth in the *Chambre des Pairs*. Then, on February 14, 1846, he ventured to make a few sober remarks on a bill limiting the patent rights of the designers of such objects as vases, chandeliers, silverware, etc. But his important speeches before the Peers were only four in number, the first being an address on the Polish question delivered on March 19, 1846. The other three dealt respectively with the *Consolidation et défense du littoral* (June 27 and July 1, 1846), *La famille Bonaparte* (June 14, 1847), and *Le pape Pie IX* (January 13, 1848).

These four major speeches reveal to the unbiased reader considerable breadth of view and a genuinely liberal temperament. They have been criticized as not being directly practical, and there is undoubtedly some truth in that criticism. Concerning Poland, for example, to demand a purely moral intervention was not practical, only military action against Austria would have been effective, but at least Hugo's speech testifies to his human sympathies, to his generosity and idealism. The speech on the *Consolidation et défense du littoral* shows Hugo more concerned than many of his contemporaries with the really important problem of the erosion of the French shore-line. Much of his speech went beyond the limitations of the point immediately under consideration. Edmond Biré pokes fun at the poet for his parliamentary ineptness, and ignores the reality of the larger issue which Hugo eloquently treated. The speech on the Bonapartes is especially famous because he had the courage to say to this monarchist assembly: "Let us talk a little about the Emperor. It will do us good." More important is the fact that this speech like the one on Pius IX is an example of Hugo's liberalism. From a modern point of view, it was, of course, a mistaken liberalism, for it is difficult today to see how a genuine liberal could have so much admiration for either Napoleon or Pius IX. Nevertheless, it was not only humane but liberal of Hugo to oppose continued exile for the Emperor's relatives after it had ceased to be conceivably neces-

sary It was above all liberal of him to declare in that speech, as he did, that the real danger to the stability of the government lay, not in the possible machinations of the aged Jérôme Bonaparte, but in the hunger and poverty of the people As for Pius IX, Hugo was not the only person at that time who thought him progressive They were all mistaken, as many including Hugo were later to admit But again, the poet's speech is an indication of his own position

Pius IX [he said to the Peers] teaches the good and sure road to kings, to peoples, to statesmen He has come, a reassuring revolutionary, to show the nations that to fertilize the furrow where the future of free peoples is germinating, it is not necessary to shed blood, it is enough to spread ideas

Peaceful political change is not only possible, it is doubtless necessary if violence is to be avoided

Further evidence of Hugo's liberalism at this date is to be seen in the manuscript on which he was working On November 17, 1845 he had begun to compose a novel, *Jean Tréjean ou les Misères*, that prose epic of the humble which was finally published nearly twenty years later under the now famous title of *Les Misérables* The manuscript gives clear evidence of Hugo's interest in humanitarian problems and of his liberal solution of those problems That interest was not only natural — as demonstrated by previous writings — but was also probably inspired by the economic situation of the country For in these years France was in the grip of a severe economic crisis Industrial development had come later than in England, but in the late thirties and early forties industry had rapidly expanded Overproduction and inadequate markets led to falling prices, decline in revenue, and unemployment The poor harvests of 1845 and 1846 with a rise in food prices aggravated the situation No reliable figures concerning unemployment are available, but there is clear evidence that begging and petty larceny greatly increased, and the unhappy lot of the workers

is eloquently indicated by the rioting and pillaging that broke out in proletarian centers in 1847. The specter of unemployment was undoubtedly abroad in the land. So it was in all likelihood direct observation of the contemporary scene that led Victor Hugo to say in *Les Misères*: "Work became scarce. That is a sad statement which must often be repeated in our still badly organized society." Thus did the humanitarian Peer recognize the ailment of capitalistic society. Moreover, in *Les Misères* he offered a solution to the economic difficulties of the hour.

That solution is by no means a socialist one. Viscount Hugo was still untouched by the economic concepts of the utopian socialists however much he may have been interested in their cosmogony.⁸ No attack on private property or the profit system came from his pen. His solution is humanitarian and progressive but in no sense revolutionary. It is to be found in the conduct of the reformed Jean Tréjean, now known to people as Father Madeleine. Having invented a new process for the fabrication of jet, Father Madeleine had rapidly made a great fortune. What is more, enriching not only himself but others, he had brought prosperity to the whole neighborhood.

Before the arrival of Father Madeleine, everything languished in the countryside, now everything lived with the healthy life of work. A strong circulation warmed everything and penetrated everywhere. Unemployment and poverty were unknown. There was no pocket so obscure in which there was not a little money, no poor man's dwelling in which there was not some joy.

Father Madeleine was an unselfish, a humanitarian capitalist. Let all capitalists conduct themselves in similar fashion and the problem of poverty is presumably solved. The task confronting men is apparently not so much the reorganization of the economic system as the reform of human character.

It seems clear from this manuscript, from the speeches in the *Chambre des Pairs*, from the *Dernier jour d'un condamné* and

⁸ H. J. Hunt, *op cit*, p. 121.

Claude Gueux, from the preface to *Marion de Lorme*, and various other texts discussed in previous chapters that Hugo was a liberal not only in economic and sociological matters, but in politics as well. But to avoid confusion we need to realize what liberalism represented in that day. The liberal was not, as to-day, necessarily a democrat. On the contrary, as Professor Soltau has clearly shown,⁹ there were real and vital differences between liberals and democrats in the 1840's, greater, indeed, than those existing between liberals and conservatives. The difference between the last two was only one of degree, for their fundamental conceptions were very similar. Both were royalists. The liberal wished to limit the King's authority and extend that of Parliament, but he believed in the monarchy and, though humane, was distrustful of the people. The democrat, on the other hand, drew his inspiration from Rousseau. He was not only humanitarian in his attitude toward the people, but was prepared to trust them. He believed, as Soltau puts it, in the sovereignty of the people as a dogma and was ready to enforce that dogma to its most logical and extreme conclusions. In his love of the people he was close to socialist thought. Now Victor Hugo's humanitarianism was ultimately to lead him into the democratic camp, but in the 1840's he was not attracted to socialism, he was not a democrat in the sense suggested, he was merely a liberal member of the House of Peers. Not that he was opposed to change. On the contrary, he favored changes but he wanted to see them come gradually and above all pacifically. A liberal monarchy with humane, beneficent intentions could lead to liberty and progress.

Such were certainly the opinions of Victor Hugo, the friend of the Duchess of Orleans, in the years of economic crisis during which he worked industriously on the composition of *Les Misères*. And then, before the tale was concluded, the contemporary scene was suddenly transformed by the Revolution of 1848.

⁹ R. Soltau, *French Political Thought in the 19th Century* (London, 1931)

CHAPTER VIII

PRELUDE TO SATIRE: THE POLITICAL EDUCATION OF A POET

Je suis de ceux qui pensent et
qui affirment qu'on peut détruire
la misère — V HUGO

VISCOUNT HUGO, the protégé of the Duchess of Orleans, could not be indifferent to the events of February. His loyalty to the Duchess, the possibility of political preferment under a régime which she might head, his distrust as an 1840 liberal of the rank and file in spite of his pity for their lot, and his dislike of violent overturns, all led him to support a regency in front of an unruly mob gathered at the Place de la Bastille. But Paris was in no mood to turn the government over to a German princess. Republicanism was in the air. No mere palace revolution would suffice. So while Hugo unsuccessfully harangued the crowd at the Bastille, the provisional government of the Second Republic was being organized by Lamartine and others at the Chamber of Deputies and the Hôtel de Ville.

Amid confusion and enthusiasm the new State got under way. In spite of all that has been said concerning its weaknesses, it has an amazing record of early accomplishment. Not only did the provisional government proclaim the famous guarantee of work — wrung, to be sure, from the moderates by a forceful minority headed by Louis Blanc — not only did it set up national workshops and institute the "Commission du Luxembourg pour les travailleurs" under the chairmanship of Louis Blanc, it also abolished the death penalty for political offenses, it proclaimed the "République démocratique une et indivisible,"

it ended slavery throughout the French colonies, it suspended the infamous "contrainte par corps" (imprisonment for debt) it abolished the pillory, it revoked the tax on salt, it recognized the principle of universal suffrage and proceeded to its organization.

Many of these accomplishments Hugo could sincerely acclaim. His humanitarian sentiments could not fail to be pleased by the abolition of the death penalty for political offenses, by the suspension of imprisonment for debt, by the suppression of the pillory, and by the death blow dealt to slavery. If he was not yet won over to the Republic, he nevertheless was ready to welcome universal suffrage. In that he went beyond the position of the average liberal of that date.

In any case there was no reason to hold aloof from the new State. Great events were occurring and Hugo was eager to play his part in them. His friend and rival, Lamartine, was in the thick of things. Chateaubriand, still alive and venerated, had once been Minister of Foreign Affairs. So Hugo cast his hat into the ring. Running on a moderate platform, he failed of election to the National Assembly in the first election on April 23, but succeeded in the complementary balloting of June 4.

By that time the political situation had changed. The moderates had won control of the Assembly in the first election, and not long after the radicals had been dropped from the government. The great middle class had no intention of surrendering power to the proletariat. On the contrary it proposed to govern the country and to maintain its economic privileges. As a consequence, the Parisian working class was becoming restless and uneasy, justly fearful of the machinations of the reaction.

A concrete issue immediately arose to test the principles of the newly elected Deputies. The National Workshops were a cause of great concern to the conservatives. These shops were really nothing more than a form of unemployment relief, pitifully inadequate at that, but they were called "socialistic" and

they were deemed dangerous in that they organized a large body of workers into a cohesive group which might be used for political or revolutionary ends. A bill was therefore introduced in the Assembly which aimed at their ultimate, and not too distant, dissolution.

To this issue Victor Hugo devoted his maiden speech. Declaring the Workshops to be a failure, and expressing his apprehension lest they pauperize the Parisian worker and transform him into an idler, he supported the conservatives' measure. He saw clearly enough that the problem of poverty and unemployment was genuine and poignant. Yet he was obsessed by the notion of a benevolent capitalism — about which, it will be remembered, he had just been writing — providing a good life for all. He, therefore, held aloof from the socialists of the Assembly, and sided with the bourgeois conservatives. There can be no doubt that on this issue, Victor Hugo, like other liberals of the Second Republic, completely failed the working class.

The result was the insurrection of June 23, for the workers of Paris were alarmed and exasperated. On April 16 and May 15 they had made on behalf of the *social* Republic peaceful demonstrations which had come to nothing. They had seen their leaders dropped unceremoniously from the government. Now the Workshops were in all probability to be taken from them. Confronted with the direst poverty, they sought redress in the only effective instrument they knew, the barricades. For three days Paris witnessed the bloodiest street fighting that had ever occurred in France. Several hundred soldiers were killed and doubtless a still greater number of workers.

Hugo was profoundly disturbed by the insurrection. His family residence was in the Place Royale and since that square was in the zone of battle he was naturally apprehensive for his family. But above all he saw in this conflict a danger to civilization. A possible return of the red republic of '93 was what he feared. Nevertheless, as a member of the group chosen by the

bureaux of the Assembly, he courageously performed his duty by going to the barricades, haranguing the insurgents, and reading newly adopted decrees. He displayed during these days far greater courage than many representatives who were later in the Legislative Assembly to be his bitter enemies. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in this open manifestation of the class-struggle the author of *Les Misères* allied himself with the *bourgeoisie* against the workers. "These poor misled workers!" he wrote his wife on the 25th. Dominated by his passion for law and order he failed to see his own share of responsibility. In that, he was of course far from alone. Jean Marie, a member of this supposedly liberal government, said of the insurrection "It is not the Republic that has fought the Republic, it is barbarism that has dared to raise its head against civilization." That attitude was widespread. Few saw with Louis Blanc the fundamental truth. "People have sought for causes," he stated, "there is only one: poverty."

During Hugo's campaign for office he had accepted the support of the executive committee of the Party of Order which had headquarters in the rue de Poitiers. He was still affiliated with that party, though his diaries reveal that he had some qualms. "I went only once to the committee of the rue de Poitiers," he wrote. "I never returned. To see it once was enough." Unlike many members of that party, Hugo felt no hatred for the vanquished proletarians. In another diary note he wrote:

Before the barricades I defended Order. Before dictatorship I defended liberty. In the presence of chimeras, I defended property, the family, inheritance, the eternal truth of the human heart. I asked for clemency toward those who had strayed and severity toward traitors, justice to all. I extended a fraternal hand to the vanquished.¹

Unconsciously Victor Hugo was beginning to change, though outwardly he remained the same.

¹ Ollendorff edition of Hugo's *Actes et paroles*, I, 642, published in 1937.

But in a book devoted primarily to Hugo's literary career we cannot enter into all the details of his political activity. We have discussed them in great detail elsewhere,² and must here be contented with saying that during the summer of 1848, while the new constitution was being debated and adopted, the poet followed a middle-of-the-road policy, sometimes supporting the conservatives, sometimes lining up with the liberals. The two great events of the summer and fall which we do need to emphasize were his founding of a newspaper and his support of Louis Napoleon for the Presidency.

It was on August 1, 1848 that the first number of *L'Événement* appeared. Its financial backers were Moïse Millaud, a friend of Émile de Girardin, Fromentin-Meurice, a half brother of Paul Meurice, and Victor Hugo himself. The editorial staff included Charles Hugo and a little later his brother, François-Victor, Auguste Vacquerie, Adolphe GaiFFE, and Paul Meurice. Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Théodore de Banville, Charles Monselet, and others contributed non-political articles during the first months of the paper's existence. Victor Hugo claimed to contribute nothing but the epigraph or slogan: *Haine vigoureuse de l'anarchie, tendre et profond amour du peuple*, which always appeared at the top of the front page. Law and order, on the one hand, humanitarianism, on the other. This was, indeed, typical of Hugo's thought, and he not only directed the policy of the paper, but in all likelihood wrote an occasional editorial. That his was the guiding mind everyone in Paris understood.

This union of conservatism and humanitarianism, resulting in a moderate, tepid liberalism, led almost inevitably to the support of Louis Napoleon. All the more so, as Hugo had been singing for nearly twenty years the praises of the first Napoleon. Now, in 1848, the former prisoner of Ham appeared to Hugo not only as a man who bore a magic name, but as a man

² "Victor Hugo during the Second Republic," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* (1935)

who had been humanized and even ennobled by suffering. During his prison days Louis Napoleon had composed his "Thoughts on the Extinction of Pauperism," which revealed, thought Hugo, genuine sympathy for the misery of the people. The poet still believed that relief for the working classes could and would come less through democratic processes than through authority. Just as Father Madeleine in *Les Misères* brought prosperity to his countryside, so could a strong and beneficent president bring political happiness and economic welfare to the French people. As Professor Soltau puts it, "he believed that the best results were achieved by a great statesman wielding large powers for the public welfare."³ Or, to use Professor Hunt's formula, he favored the "government of a single man in the interest of all."⁴ When, therefore, Louis Napoleon called on Hugo and promised him that he would be a Washington rather than a Napoleon, a "good citizen" rather than a "guilty hero," he found a receptive ear. Hugo decided, together with Émile de Girardin, to throw his support to Louis Napoleon's candidacy. On October 28 *L'Événement* published its opening editorial of the campaign which waxed ever hotter till December 10.

Hugo's adversaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries claim that from the outset the poet envisaged the *coup d'État*, and they cite various votes by Hugo in the assembly in support of that contention. Such an interpretation is not completely impossible, though it seems highly doubtful. In any case, one cannot help feeling that if Hugo sincerely believed that Louis Napoleon would loyally support the Constitution and the Republic, he was singularly naive. The Left harbored no such illusions. On November 2, the *Démocratie pacifique* uttered a prophetic warning: "Does Louis Napoleon intend to remain under the Republic and be contented with the constitutional

³ R. Soltau, Introduction to edition of Hugo's *Châtiments* (London, 1925)

⁴ H. J. Hunt, "L'Impulsion socialiste dans la pensée politique de V. Hugo," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1933)

presidency? We shall never believe it" But to this suggestion Hugo paid no heed. And whatever one may think of his vision or motives, there can be no doubt of his political acumen, for on December 10, 1848 his candidate was overwhelmingly elected

For six months Victor Hugo managed to support pretty consistently both the Conservative Party and the new President. But in June and July of 1849 his loyalty to the former was subjected to severe strain. Two issues bothered him: the Roman expedition and public relief for the poor.

The Roman problem antedated the presidential election. In the fall of 1848 the people of Rome revolted against the papal power and the Pope fled to Gaeta. A French army was dispatched to Italy to protect French interests, for Austria was likely to intervene. If the Pope was to be restored to temporal power, the French did not wish the Austrians to profit from it. The French government claimed to be innocent of any desire to destroy Italian liberties. With this general policy the new President agreed, and so did Victor Hugo. But the situation became more acute in February 1849 when the Romans under the leadership of Mazzini proclaimed a Republic. Austria then swung into action. Her armies defeated the Piedmontese in March and then moved southward. The French, not to be outdone, decided to increase the size of their expeditionary force, at the same time maintaining, in the words of Prime Minister Barrot, that "the French flag would be engaged only in the interest of France and . . . in the interest . . . of genuine liberty and guarantees of good government." Soon after, French troops under General Oudinot attacked Rome only to be repulsed by patriotic Italian revolutionaries under Garibaldi. It was now a question of the "honor of French arms." Oudinot was reinforced. On June 3 he attacked again, but it took a month's siege to capture the Eternal City.

Meanwhile, the truth was beginning to dawn on Victor Hugo.

On June 9 his paper, *L'Événement*, declared editorially that the expedition was being turned from its proper purpose. The aim of France was not to restore a reactionary government; its aim should be a restoration on "liberal and French terms." That was undoubtedly Hugo's policy, but it was not the policy of the conservative majority of the Legislative Assembly.

Four days later, on June 13, a large popular demonstration, organized by French democrats, took place in the streets of Paris. General Changarnier used military force to clear the streets. The Assembly voted a state of siege. Ledru-Rollin, a leader of the Left, was forced to flee the country. Other deputies were unseated. The reaction even went so far that Changarnier's men broke into the offices of certain newspapers and smashed their printing presses. This last episode was more than Victor Hugo could stand. He did not like the demonstration which he feared might turn into a new insurrection. But to smash printing presses was going much too far, and Hugo protested in no uncertain terms. In so doing he irritated his friends of the rue de Poitiers, and for the first time he found himself in open hostility toward them.

The other issue, public relief for the poor, came to a head in July 1849. The Catholic philanthropist, Vicomte de Melun, had introduced a bill providing for a commission to study housing conditions and to make plans for public relief. Hugo's humanitarian sentiments were aroused, and on July 9 he made his famous speech on poverty (*La Misère*). On the Right side of the Chamber he was one of the few to realize that "the man of the masses suffers today from the twofold and contradictory feeling of his actual poverty and of the greatness to which he knows himself entitled." Furthermore Hugo realized that society must mitigate that frustration and satisfy in some degree that longing. He also believed that it could be done. The keynote of his speech, therefore, is his famous declaration that poverty can be abolished.

I am not one of those who believe that suffering can be suppressed

in this world, suffering is a divine law, but I am one of those who think and affirm that poverty can be destroyed.

This admirable statement provoked the irony of the Right, but created less disturbance, perhaps, than a remark made in an earlier part of the speech. Hugo had the courage (or the maladroitness, depending on one's point a view) to suggest that some conservatives were opposed to the bill on the pretext that it was socialism in disguise, that nothing more could be done or should be attempted than what had been done in the past; in short that a policy of *laissez faire* should be adopted. This accusation brought a salvo of protests from the floor, and, in addition, sarcastic comments from Dupin, the Assembly's presiding officer.

From that day on Hugo's relations with the Party of Order were strained. He had let out an awkward truth, and the men of the rue de Poitiers, in particular the Comte de Falloux and Montalembert, were furious. But events soon proved that Hugo had in no sense exaggerated. The *Commission d'assistance publique*, created by the bill, got absolutely nothing done, and poor Armand de Melun was virtually repudiated by his own party. The editor of the *Constitutionnel*, while ungraciously admitting his good intentions, called him "one of the most chimerical minds of the national Assembly."

These two events, the attack on Rome and the debate on the Melun bill, mark a turning-point in Victor Hugo's political evolution. He was now suspicious of the conservative majority, but he still retained a measure of confidence in the President. While he was in that frame of mind, the summer of 1849 wore on. Rome fell on July 3 to French arms. On the fourteenth (ironical date), General Oudinot restored the temporal power of the Papacy, neglecting to exact any guarantee of political liberty for the Roman people.

On August 22, while the Romans were still ruefully gazing on the ruins of their short-lived republic, a World Peace Congress met in Paris. Elihu Burritt, an idealistic American —

well known in his day as "the learned blacksmith" — founder of the League of Universal Brotherhood, and Henry Richard, secretary of the London Peace Society, had undertaken to organize the Congress. Burritt's initial attempts in France in 1848 had not been successful. The first Congress was, therefore, held in Brussels. But in 1849 the French were more receptive. Émile de Girardin gave his support, and the Free Trade Economists, Horace Say, Michel Chevalier, and F. Bastiat were won over, as was Lamartine with whom Burritt and Richard talked at length. De Tocqueville, impressed by the adherence of the economists to the cause, received Burritt and Richard and assured them that the government would authorize the Congress.⁵ Victor Hugo agreed to lend his name to the undertaking, and at the opening session he was elected President.

The prepared address which Hugo delivered was an eloquent, sonorous, and idealistic utterance. He prophesied that "a day will come when there will be no other battle fields than markets open to commerce and minds receptive to ideas", that one day

cannon will be exhibited in museums just as instruments of torture are today. A day will come [he added] when those two immense groups, the United States of America and the United States of Europe, shall be seen placed in the presence of each other, extending the hand of fellowship across the seas, exchanging their produce, their commerce, their industry, their arts, their genius, clearing the earth, peopling the deserts, improving creation under the eye of the Creator, and uniting, for the good of all, these two infinite forces, the fraternity of men and the power of God.

The fifteen hundred persons who listened to these words were profoundly moved. Elihu Burritt said that "each sentence seemed to be an oration condensed into the soul of eloquence, and as the lofty and burning periods fell upon the assembly

⁵ I am indebted for these details to Prof. Merle Curti's *American Peace Crusade* (1929), chap. viii.

they responded to their power by repeated bursts of applause."

At the closing session Hugo spoke again. He took advantage of the presence of the curé of the Madeleine, Abbé Dequerry, and the Protestant leader, Pastor Coquerel, as well as of the date — it was the anniversary of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day — to emphasize the progress in tolerance that mankind had already made, and to declare his belief in the inevitability of progress under the beneficent eye of a providential deity. The emotion of the delegates, we are told, was indescribable. Less enthusiasm was displayed by the French Press which, with a few exceptions, was frankly ironical. And in truth it must be admitted that Victor Hugo in his vision of world peace and European federation was far ahead of his time. We can only hope that he was not also ahead of ours.

Hardly had the Peace Congress been disbanded and August passed into oblivion when the political scene in France was enlivened by the publication of Louis Bonaparte's famous letter to Edgar Ney. The President had been profoundly annoyed by Oudinot's act of the fourteenth and exasperated by the installation of a governing commission of three reactionary cardinals. Quite sincerely he did not wish to be associated with an absolutist restoration. Furthermore, he was restive under the dominance of the legislative majority which he knew to be in many respects hostile to him. He, therefore, wrote to his aide de camp that the French Republic had not sent an army to Rome for the purpose of "strangling Italian liberty." On the contrary! The President then said categorically.

I sum up as follows the temporal power of the Pope, general amnesty, secularization of the administration, Napoleonic code, and liberal government.

Without previous consultation with the cabinet Louis Bonaparte sent the letter to Ney. It was revealed to the French public on September 7.

The Pope answered Louis Bonaparte with his deceptive *Motu*

proprio. The document promised his beloved subjects a few semblances of political rights and proclaimed an amnesty. The latter, however, contained so many categories of exceptions that it was meaningless. Certainly the whole document was very far from realizing the four-point program set forth in the letter to Ney. It created at once a difficult and delicate political situation for the French President. Was he to impose his program on the Holy Father by force or arms? That would alienate the clerical party in France and perhaps breed enemies beyond the frontiers. Was he tamely to acquiesce? That would make him the laughingstock of Europe.

Here was a situation that seemed made to order for Victor Hugo. If the President maintained the situation set forth in the letter to Ney, Hugo could legitimately play an important and valuable rôle. For the President's policy was one which he whole-heartedly approved

The parliamentary debate opened on October 15 with a speech by Thiers in which he interpreted the *Motu proprio* in outrageously optimistic fashion, maintaining that Cardinal Antonelli's repressive measures were in reality liberal concessions. He made no reference to the President's letter. For once Thiers was not clever enough. Louis' indignation was unbounded. "It is perhaps the only time," says Barrot, "that I ever saw Louis Napoleon animated by anything resembling passion." The Chief of State then wrote Barrot a vigorous letter in which he declared himself ready to support "the political honor of the expedition."

For a day or two after Thiers's speech the President seemed determined to maintain the policy set forth in his letter to Ney and reaffirmed, though in somewhat more moderate terms, in his confidential letter to Barrot. Certainly, Hugo who dined on the fifteenth at the Élysée, got that impression. That Bonaparte's resolution was to be shaken by the events of the eighteenth and nineteenth of October was something that Hugo could not foresee.

De Tocqueville, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, opened the debate on October 18 with a speech that repeated Thiers's contention that the *Motu proprio* was a satisfactory document, but which did not make the mistake of ignoring the letter to Ney. On the contrary, de Tocqueville declared there was no real conflict between the letter and the papal edict. This thesis must have been a surprise to many, including Louis Napoleon. It certainly astonished Victor Hugo, who even after reflection apparently did not realize that de Tocqueville's speech meant that the cabinet as a whole refused to follow the President's lead.

On the nineteenth, Hugo, still confident of the President's determination to press on in the path already entered, delivered one of his most eloquent orations. He began by declaring that the original purpose of the Roman expedition had been to protect the cause of true liberty in Rome, that the venture had been turned aside from that initial purpose. The clerical government set up in Rome, he said, "animated by the deadliest, blindest, and most ungrateful spirit, has wounded generous hearts and wise men, and deeply alarmed the intelligent friends of the Pope and the Papacy." In these circumstances, the orator continued, appeared the letter to Ney. Supporting the letter, the poet maintained that

It traced for the Pope, to whom we have rendered the service, a little too great perhaps, of restoring him without waiting for the acclamation of his people the serious program of a "government of liberty," for, I cannot otherwise translate the expression "liberal government."

Hugo then went on to disclose the deceptive quality of the *Motu proprio*. The Vatican, he said, "grants a mass proscription. Only it has the kindness to call this proscription by the name of amnesty." He declared flatly that between the *Motu proprio* and the letter to Ney an immense gulf existed and that the Assembly must choose between the two. In an admirable peroration he denounced the tyrannical régime functioning in the

Eternal City and with infinite wisdom maintained that the only way for Rome to be reconciled with the Papacy was for the latter to understand the nineteenth century and nobly to "hoist the double flag, so dear to Italy, of Secularization and Nationality." France, he said, should aid such a reconciliation. The Assembly could do so by supporting the President's letter as against the *Motu proprio* of the Pope

Unfortunately, while this speech enraged Montalembert and others of the Right, it did not win Hugo the gratitude of Louis Napoleon. The President, hesitating to break with the conservative majority, was embarrassed by the poet's speech which put the issue in too clear-cut and brutally realistic terms. The two men met on the twentieth and the President, instead of praising Hugo, actually censured him. The poet naturally did not enjoy such treatment, and left the palace in indignation.⁶

Such are, in brief, the circumstances which led not only to Hugo's break with the legislative majority, but to serious discord with the President. That it was caused more by principle and conviction than by petty pride and ambition is clear. If one overlooks the details, as certain critics have, it is easy to say that Hugo was a turncoat, that in the autumn of 1849 he betrayed a cause which he had supported the previous spring. A detailed examination of the record shows that on the question of economic relief he was during this period consistently humanitarian, and that on the Roman question he showed marked misgivings as early as June 9. The speech of October 19 was a logical outcome of the position he took in June. That speech was perhaps "oratorical," but it was genuinely liberal. The essential thing for students of Hugo to realize is that the poet was magnificently right, that his denunciation of the tyranny in Rome was justified, that his statement of the issue confronting France was accurate, that the policy he advocated was

⁶ This whole episode of the Roman expedition and its influence on Hugo's career I have treated in much greater detail in my "Victor Hugo during the Second Republic" Mr. Josephson in his biography has done me the honor of following my analysis closely.

humane and liberal. Liberty-loving men in Hugo's day applauded his words, and in our own day liberty-loving men may well follow that example.

Whether Hugo knew it or not, he was on his way to the Mountain.⁷ His definite journey to that political grouping came in connection with the *loi Falloux*, that controversial bill which tended to put education at least partially in the hands of the clergy. Montalembert and his associates believed that "today two armies confront each other in France, each having thirty to forty thousand troops, the army of the schoolteachers and the army of the curés. . . . Against the demoralizing and anarchistic army of the schoolteachers we must fight with the army of the clergy." Louis Bonaparte's new cabinet supported Falloux's bill, and Victor Hugo began to realize that the gulf between him and the President was about as great as the gulf which separated him from the Bourbon and Orleanist clericals. But, courageously indifferent to conservative and presidential reactions, he delivered on January 15, 1850 an impassioned two-hour speech against the *loi Falloux* in which he declared that the future of France should not be entrusted to the clerical party. His words provoked an indescribable uproar in the Assembly and when he finished all the members of the Left, numbering nearly two hundred, marched in salute before him. His political evolution was now almost complete.

In fact, all that remained was for Hugo to break more openly with the President. That final move did not come for some months. Meanwhile, as a leader of the Mountain, Hugo spoke against the *guillotine sèche* in an address opposing the exile of political criminals to tropical penal colonies (April 5, 1850) and against restriction of universal suffrage (May 21, 1850). He was, of course, continually accused of apostasy by his former associates of the rue de Poitiers. His effective reply was that if he was a renegade, he was a strange sort of one for he was passing "from the camp of the victors to that of the van-

⁷ The name given to the radicals, it was inherited from the French Revolution

quished." But he maintained that he was only "a man of order who sees reaction before him, that is, disorder, and who fights it." And in his private notes, recently published, he wrote:

I was born in an environment which made me royalist from childhood and in a sense before I could know what I was, then . . . as I advanced in life, with the help of experience and meditation, by degrees and like many other men, I came to the ideas of my time and of my country I am . . . in my very obscure and limited sphere a living proof of the truth and the irresistible force of this democracy, which you fight.^a

That was, indeed, the truth of the matter

By midsummer the inevitable break with the President came. Louis Bonaparte was clearly maneuvering for a second consecutive term, expressly forbidden by the Constitution. In August, Hugo's newspaper, *L'Événement*, openly declared its hostility to the scheming Chief of State.

The following year was largely devoted to a constant struggle between the Assembly and the President. The conservative majority, interested in restoring the monarchy, was hostile to Bonaparte. The Mountain was hostile to both. The President, rather skillfully, it must be admitted, played one against the other.

Knowing that amendment of the Constitution was very unlikely, since a three-fourths vote was necessary, the President's supporters nevertheless introduced a measure which, if passed, would allow Bonaparte to be a candidate in 1852. After three days of discussion Victor Hugo arose, on July 17, 1851, to make his now famous speech. With his son in prison — Charles had been condemned for an editorial denouncing the death penalty — and with the Republic threatened, Hugo found more eloquent words than ever. He recalled the glories of Charlemagne and the first Napoleon, and then exclaimed

What! because ten centuries ago, Charlemagne, after forty years

^a Ollendorff edition (1937) of *Actes et paroles*, I, 656

of glory, let fall upon the face of the globe a sword and scepter so immeasurably great that no one since has been able or has dared to touch them, and yet in the interval there were men named Philip-Augustus, Francis I, Henri IV, Louis XIV, because, a thousand years later, another genius appeared who picked up this sword and scepter and who stood erect over the continent, who accomplished the gigantic history whose brilliance still endures, who leashed the Revolution in France and unleashed it in Europe, who made his name synonymous with Friedland, Montmirail, Rivoli, Jena, Essling. What! because, after ten years of immense glory he in turn dropped through exhaustion this sword and scepter which had achieved so many colossal things, you come and wish to pick them up after him, even as he, Napoleon, had lifted them up from Charlemagne! . You want to take into your little hands this scepter of Titans, this sword of giants! What for? What! after Augustus, Augustulus! What! Because we have had Napoleon the Great, must we have Napoleon the Little!

Napoléon le Petit Never was a Hugolian antithesis more appropriate, more devastating, or more prophetic. Had France been in a different temper it would doubtless have ruined the President's ambitions. But outside of Paris the country was indifferent to the Republic. The ruling economic class was rallying more and more to Bonaparte's cause. Hugo's words were brilliant, but in 1851 they fell on deaf ears.

The dénouement came rapidly. After a little more maneuvering and when he saw that he had practically nothing to fear, the President struck. During the night of December 1-2, 1851, legislative leaders were arrested and the capital was occupied by reliable troops. In the morning — it was the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz — the President dissolved the Assembly, proclaimed the restoration of universal suffrage, and announced that the nation would have a chance to approve or disapprove at the polls what had taken place.

And Victor Hugo? At eight o'clock in the morning of December 2 he learned what had happened since midnight, and set out from his house at number 37 rue de la Tour d'Auvergne (where he had been living since the spring of 1849) to see what

could be done. One group of Deputies met with O Barrot and decided to draw up a protest against the violence done to the Assembly and to declare that Louis Napoleon was no longer President. A much larger group met at the Mairie of the 10th *arrondissement* and voted a similar decree. But soldiers arrived shortly after, expelled the Representatives from the Mairie, and imprisoned most of them. Hugo attended neither of these meetings. He joined rather a group of republican Deputies at number 70 rue Blanche. Michel (de Bourges), Edgar Quinet, Alexandre Rey, Théodore Bac, Baudin, and Charamaule were among those present. Hugo called for immediate armed resistance to the *coup d'État*. But Michel (de Bourges) argued for caution. The working-class districts were not excited by the President's acts, the workers having little or no respect for the conservative majority of parliament. The republican Deputies heeded these words and voted against an immediate call to arms. They determined instead to spread propaganda against the usurpation, propaganda which might soon be turned into action.

This policy was put into effect, and with some success, for the morning of December 3 saw a number of barricades being erected and before the morning was over Baudin, one of the republican Deputies, had sacrificed his life. His heroism has been frequently told, but is worth repeating. He and several other Deputies were at the *faubourg* Saint-Antoine. When a sympathizer of Louis Napoleon cried out: "Down with the twenty-five franc men!" Baudin replied: "You will see how one dies for twenty-five francs." Shortly after, he fell, a victim of the first volley fired against the barricade. By evening the tide seemed to be rising against Bonaparte. In the east end and in the Latin quarter republicans were in control of the streets. The Government, alarmed, decided on more aggressive military action.

The next day, December 4, witnessed bloody scenes and

* The Deputies were paid 25 francs a day

brought a decisive victory to Louis Napoleon. Near the Porte Saint-Denis an unnecessary massacre occurred which Hugo has recorded in his *Histoire d'un crime*. He had been attending a meeting at Jules Grévy's house and heard the shooting. Rushing out, he was in time to see the corpses strewn on the ground and to hear the wounded crying out in pain. A few hours later he witnessed another tragic scene: the grief of an old woman whose little grandson has been killed while crossing a street. It later inspired the beautiful poem "Souvenir de la nuit du 4." Such events led Hugo to look upon Louis Bonaparte not merely as a usurper, but as a murderer. A murderer who achieved his ends, for this policy of force was as triumphant as it was morally culpable. By the night of the fourth all resistance was suppressed. Although the Empire was not yet proclaimed, the Second Republic had ceased to exist.

Meanwhile, on the third, orders had finally been issued for Victor Hugo's arrest. He had been fearful of that eventuality from the beginning and with the help of Juliette Drouet had taken precautions. The night of December 2 he spent with Monsieur and Mme de la Roellerie in the rue Caumartin. The next night he moved, thanks to Juliette's activity, to Henri d'Escamps' apartment located at 19 rue de Richelieu where he stayed till the sixth. Then Juliette found him another refuge with M. de Montferrier whom she had known years before at Les Metz. There he remained for five days hidden from Louis Napoleon's police. Sometimes in the next room he could overhear rumors that he had been killed. He now realized that he must flee the country. With the help of Mme Drouet and of a workman by the name of Lanvin whom he had once befriended, a passport was obtained for him in Lanvin's name. On the evening of December 11, 1851, armed with this passport, clad in rough clothing which gave him the appearance of a manual worker, he boarded the night train for Brussels. At the frontier his passport was perfunctorily examined and the train rolled on into the Belgian countryside. When he reached Brussels he

was greeted by the faithful Juliette. She had won new rights, indeed, to the poet's devotion.

Victor Hugo entered his exile with abundant material for literary labors. The sights he had just witnessed were vivid in his mind and were soon to inspire eloquent poems. The whole history of the Second Republic and its betrayal constituted a fascinating subject on which he could claim to speak with some authority, for his three years' experience in politics had been extremely enlightening. He had learned something of the ingratitude of politicians, he had seen how economic and ecclesiastical interests can combine to defeat or retard political and social progress, he had observed with what ease the people can be seduced into betraying their own cause, he had partially, though not wholly, learned that humanitarian ideals can rarely be advanced by placing in power men whose economic interests are in conflict with those ideals, in other words, that the parties of the Right are inevitably reactionary and unprogressive; he had finally understood, as Professor Hunt has suggested, that the pleasant conception of an all-powerful, but just and beneficent ruler is a snare and a delusion, one of the chimeras and follies of mankind. In the bitterness of exile Hugo was now to reflect on these fundamental truths.

CHAPTER IX

JERSEY AND "LES CHÂTIMENTS"

O stormy voice of France!

— TENNYSON

VICTOR HUGO's sojourn in Brussels was not to be of long duration. While it lasted, he lived at number 27 in the Grand' Place, that unique central square of Brussels with its beautiful medieval architecture. His wife and daughter were still in Paris, as were his sons, both of whom were now in prison. But Hugo was not alone. Besides the faithful Juliette, there were many political exiles. Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux, Félix Pyat, Victor Schœlcher, were the most notable among them. Alexandre Dumas was there too — for quite different reasons. He had fled from his creditors, but was nonetheless living in Brussels on a lavish scale. Hugo, on the other hand, though solvent, lived quite modestly. By going into exile and refusing to knuckle down to Bonaparte he lost an income of about sixty thousand francs a year. Fortunately, he still had some money in foreign investments which kept him from starvation.

While Hugo saw his fellow exiles frequently, he did not delay in getting to work. In five months he composed his *Histoire d'un crime*. This was in two volumes and he found no publisher either in Belgium or England bold enough to assume the risk of publication. Hugo, therefore, determined to write a shorter, one-volume work and in one month he produced *Napoléon-le-Petit*, a veritable philippic against the usurper whom Hugo denounces as a mediocre cheat and assassin. The book was no less violent than the *Histoire d'un crime*, but Hugo finally got it printed in England.

No one has dared to buy the manuscript [he wrote his wife], it is merely being printed, that is the limit of English audacity.

I have composed this book since you left us¹ I shall publish the *Histoire du Deux Décembre* later. Being forced to postpone it, I did not want Bonaparte to profit from the delay I hope you will all be pleased with *Napoléon-le-Petit* It is one of my best things.

The new work was widely read, not only in Belgium where it was freely sold, but also in France where it was smuggled across the frontier

Before *Napoléon-le-Petit* appeared in print, the Belgian authorities some of whom were very friendly to Hugo got wind of it and warned him that its publication would be inevitably embarrassing to the Belgian government which was forced to maintain amicable relations with France. Hugo took the hint, and on August 1, 1852, accompanied by his son Charles (whose prison sentence had expired in January), he embarked for London where he stayed for only three days before moving on to Jersey — sunny Jersey, as the English sometimes call it, situated within sight of the French coast, so near, yet for the poet so far away.

There, within walking distance of the busy port of Saint-Hélier, Hugo rented a furnished house called Marine Terrace. A fortnight later Mme Hugo, who had finally disposed of their belongings in Paris, joined him. His daughter Adèle, and his other son François-Victor arrived with their mother, as did the faithful Auguste Vacquerie who had remained close to the Hugos ever since the death of his brother Charles in that tragic boating accident near Villequier. Not far from Marine Terrace Juliette Drouet was established in a small apartment where Hugo did much of his writing and received some of his fellow exiles who were fairly numerous on the islands. The people of Jersey looked askance at this extra-conjugal situation of the poet's but were tolerant enough not to interfere with it.

¹ Mme Hugo had made a trip to Brussels but returned to Paris to dispose of their possessions in the apartment of the rue de la Tour d'Auvergne

A few months after Hugo reached his Jersey refuge he received a visit from his old friend Mme Émile de Girardin. It will be recalled that he had first known her as Delphine Gay, and that later she had been of great assistance to him when he sought election to the French Academy. Her husband had been a close associate during the Second Republic. The poet was, therefore, delighted to see Mme de Girardin when she appeared at Marine Terrace in September 1853.

She brought with her the latest news from Paris and the latest Parisian "indoor sport", table-tipping. It was all the rage in the French capital, and the enthusiastic Delphine had been won over — all the more easily, perhaps, as she was already stricken with a fatal malady. At first Victor Hugo would have nothing to do with it, and Mme de Girardin had to hold séances without him. To her chagrin the various tables she used simply would not tip. Finally, on September 11, the night before she was to leave, she persuaded Hugo to sit in. After a quarter of an hour's concentration the table began to tip and soon began to answer questions. Suddenly, according to Auguste Vacquerie, as if impatient with the type of question being asked, it refused to answer, but continued to tip as if it had something to say. "Is the same spirit present?" asked Mme de Girardin. Two strokes, meaning no, responded. "Who are you?" And the table spelled out the reply. *L-é-o-p-o-l-d-i-n-e*

One can imagine the emotion of those present, however incredulous some of them might be. Victor Hugo was profoundly moved and his wife burst into tears. Even the skeptical Vacquerie was impressed in spite of himself. They plied the spirit of Léopoldine with questions, and she either answered them or said that she was unable to answer. At last, after several hours, she said *Adieu*, and the table stopped tipping.

Table-tipping at once became a major activity at Marine Terrace. "We did not wait for evening," says Vacquerie, "we began at noon and did not stop till morning. At most we interrupted the séance for dinner . . . The sound of the sea was

mingled with these dialogues, the mysterious quality of which was enhanced by winter, night, tempest, and isolation." Hugo himself never touched the table, but at a distance asked questions. Charles was usually the medium, and it was Mme Hugo who most often assisted her son. Auguste Vacquerie attended nearly all the séances, as did Mlle Adèle Hugo. Several exiles, friends of the poet, came frequently.

For a long time, in spite of the fact that the table became very exacting, demanding that questions be put in verse form, in spite of the fact that the spirits of Dante and Shakespeare as well as those of some illustrious animals (Androcles' lion, for instance) all spoke in perfect French, though some occasionally used Latin, and in spite of the fact that the table quite obviously reflected the ideas and beliefs of those present, Victor Hugo was strongly influenced by this experience.

That the table expressed the political views of Victor Hugo is unquestionable. On the second evening of these séances Hugo called up the shade of his great adversary, by no means dead, but still alive and vigorous.

Who are you?
Bonaparte
The great?
No
The little, then? The one they call Napoleon III?
Yes
Ah! wretch, I've got you. Who sends you?
My uncle
Why?
To be punished

What is your feeling toward me?
Hatred and respect

The presence of the spirit of a living man was explained by saying that he was asleep and dreaming, the spirit came then in a dream.

The table also gave expression to Victor Hugo's religious

ideas, particularly his belief in reincarnation and in the absence of any eternal punishment. On December 8, 1853, for example, the spirit of Moses, speaking excellent French, declared:

All criminals will be slowly transfigured and will become just men
The distant radiance of God will melt those icy hearts, and their
crimes will flow away in avalanches into the abyss of divine pardon

On March 22, 1855 the spirit of Christ stated:

The tables will introduce supernatural truths into human truths,
they will prove the fraternity of men with animals, the equality of
animals with plants, the equality of plants with stones, the solidarity
of stones with stars. . . .

Even Hugo was astonished to find that his personal ideas had been accepted by the founder of Christianity who had never thought of them during his own lifetime. The poet's surprise is a measure of his sincerity.

The fact is that Hugo found in these "revelations" confirmation of his deepest convictions. He wrote to Mme de Girardin on January 4, 1855: "The table tells us the most surprising things. . . . A whole system of cosmogony that I have been brooding over — and partly written out — during the last twenty years, has been confirmed by the tables, and with magnificent elaboration." That system of cosmogony was to receive poetic treatment in *Les Contemplations* and in *Dieu*, two important works of Hugo's maturity.

The séances continued for nearly two years, and became a source of great emotional strain for Victor Hugo and even more for his son Charles and his daughter Adèle. Mme Hugo, after being impressed for a while, recovered her natural common sense, and expressed not only her skepticism but her hostility. In 1855 events occurred which led to the departure of the Hugos from Jersey. This interrupted the séances, and they were never resumed.

The principal and most important literary occupation of

Victor Hugo during his Jersey sojourn was the composition of *Les Châtiments*, a volume of satiric poetry, published in November 1853. For Hugo's wrath had been by no means exhausted by the composition of *Napoléon-le-Petit* and the *Histoire d'un crime*. He was eager to express in verse many of the things that only partially satisfied him in prose. Lines were running in his head and he had jotted down some of them while still in Belgium. Now in Jersey he really got to work and in the latter part of 1852 and the early months of 1853 he completed that amazing series of poems.

Printed in Belgium and smuggled across the frontier, *Les Châtiments* were enthusiastically received in France. They owed their initial success in part, of course, to the interdiction which Napoleon's government at once laid upon them. Nothing is so likely to stimulate the public. And, as luck would have it, when the first French edition did appear seventeen years later, historical events again created a favorable atmosphere, for the defeat of Napoleon III at Sedan made the author of *Les Châtiments* seem like a singularly inspired prophet. Yet the poems were of great intrinsic value. In 1870 Francisque Sarcey spoke for many when he said: "The book sparkles with sublime beauties and is full of admirable pieces in which one feels every line marked with the stamp of the lion." Almost a hundred years later readers on both sides of the Atlantic have the same reaction.

"Six thousand lines of insults," was Lamartine's well-known comment. And the book is indeed one long diatribe, one incredible flagellation, one unending denunciation of the Second Empire and the man who brought it into being. That is the peculiar fascination of *Les Châtiments*, the subject is always the same, yet ever renewed. One storm of indignation is followed by another. Surely, the reader thinks, the sources of this fury are now desiccated. But no! the heavens open and a new flood descends. The metaphors, the similes, the narratives, the sarcasms, the epithets, are inexhaustible. Such vituperation is

beyond the capacity of an ordinary poet. There is genius in this very amplitude of the treatment of a single theme.

Les Châtiments, moreover, seemed new in spite of the fact that satiric poetry and prose had been composed for centuries. In the sixteenth century Rabelais had published his satire of French institutions and Ronsard his poetic *Discours sur les misères de ce temps*. In the same period Agrippa d'Aubigné had penned *Les Tragiques*. The seventeenth century had known Molière and the eighteenth, Voltaire. André Chénier had written his *Iambes* before the century of enlightenment was over. In the nineteenth Béranger, Barbier, and Barthélemy had all composed poems of satiric content and import. There was, then, a long tradition of satiric literature in France with which Hugo was doubtless familiar. Indeed, there is some reason to think that he was particularly struck by the *Némésis* of Barthélemy which had a vivacity and picturesqueness of vituperation that could not fail to please him. Barthélemy was unfortunately an unreliable fellow, after having sung of progress and liberty in 1847 (in another poem entitled *Le Zodiaque*), he accepted the *coup d'État* of 1851 with, as Berret says, suspicious alacrity. Yet from his *Némésis* Hugo got, if not inspiration — it would be a serious exaggeration to say that — undoubtedly some suggestions. But a detailed comparison between Hugo and any of these satirists reveals an immense gulf. Voltaire had written mostly in prose. No poet in France, not even d'Aubigné or Ronsard with all their talent, could equal Hugo's eloquence and intensity of passion.

Louis Napoleon emerges from these fiery pages as an unspeakable tyrant, the destroyer of liberty, the unprincipled usurper of political power, the unfeeling executioner who sent countless victims, including even children, to their death or to a penal colony, that *guillotine sèche* which in Hugo's eyes was a more cruel fate. But these are relatively dignified terms of denunciation. Hugo does far better than that. Louis Napoleon is labeled a brigand, a modern Cartouche or Poulmann, a Mis-

ter Ambush; he is not only Napoléon-le-Petit but Napoléon-le-Nain (Napoleon the Dwarf), a cockney of Eglintown and Epsom, a circus rider and sword-swallower, a wolf who tries to be a tiger and succeeds in being only a monkey. Such epithets pour in a constant stream from the poet's pen. Yet they give little idea of the talent contained in these volumes

That talent is to be found both in the details and in the major aspects of the composition A magnificent poem like "Nox," which opens the book, is a good illustration. The very implication of the title is skillful as well as eloquent, for it represents not only that night chosen by Louis Napoleon to arrest the Representatives who might have resisted, but also the general darkness which with the suppression of liberty has now spread over France. The first section of the poem suggests with dramatic force the events of that night of December 1 and the following days with the killing of Baudin and Dussoubs along with other unnamed victims. Then Hugo begins the second section with the impressive line (worthy of Racine):

C'est fini! le silence est partout, et l'horreur

Louis Napoleon and his crowd have triumphed. Hugo describes the indecent joy of those who expect to profit from that triumph. A bitter comparison between Napoleon III and the great Napoleon follows, it closes with a stanza that well illustrates Hugo's use of metaphor and irony in this collection:

Alors il vint, cassé de débauches, l'œil terne,
Furtif, les traits pâles,
Et ce voleur de nuit alluma sa lanterne
Au soleil d'Austerlitz!

The four lines combine in extraordinarily effective contrast a reminder of the usurpation (suggested by the word "voleur") of power by Louis Napoleon on the anniversary of Austerlitz and the military glory of the first Napoleon.

Doubtless the most talented section of this brilliant poem is the fifth with its grim, realistic picture of the half-buried

corpses of Montmartre, victims of Louis Napoleon's regiments. David d'Angers was the poet's source for this episode. The great sculptor had seen in the cemetery of Montmartre about forty bodies only partially covered with earth, the heads still exposed for identification. He told Hugo of what he had seen, and Hugo did not fail to make good use of it.

Ils étaient là, sanglants, froids, la bouche entr'ouverte,
La face vers le ciel, blêmes dans l'herbe verte,
Effroyables à voir dans leur tranquillité,
Éventrés, balafrés, le visage fouetté
Par la ronce qui tremble au vent du crépuscule

Spectres du même crime et des mêmes désastres,
De leur œil fixe et vide ils regardaient les astres

A month later, says the poet, "this man went to Notre-Dame " *A Te Deum* was celebrated there on January 1 in honor of the new régime. The contrast between this section and the corpses of Montmartre is highly effective.

Then comes an apostrophe to the ocean. Can this spectacle of nature bring the poet calm? Hardly, for its "grâce immense" is mingled with its "immense horreur." The poet sees, in spite of all, a vision that recalls the dreadful reality to him, ~~a vision of the prison ships carrying the victims of despotism to the penal colony of Cayenne.~~

Yet hope will not die. The poet remembers the French Revolution which allows him still to believe in progress and fraternity. Let it not be said that because of this wretch (Louis Napoleon) the world has retrogressed. There is, therefore, no cause for despair. There is cause only for indignation, for grim determination. And Hugo closes this masterly poem with lines which reaffirm his intention to lash continually at the usurper.

Toi qu'aimait Juvénal gonflé de lave ardente
Toi dont la clarté luit dans l'œil fixe de Dante,
Muse Indignation, viens, dressons maintenant,
Dressons sur cet empire heureux et rayonnant,

Et sur cette victoire au tonnerre échappée,
Assez de piloris pour faire une épopée!

"Épopée"! If the noun can be properly applied to the whole volume, the adjective can be applied with equal justification to this first composition which has an undeniably epic ring. Berret speaks of its "magnificence épique" as well as of the "variété de son lyrisme." No unbiased reader can deny these qualities to the opening poem of *Les Châtiments*.

The epic note is clearly audible in other poems of the collection, particularly in "A l'obéissance passive" and in "L'Expiation." Both are based on the antithesis which Hugo saw between the heroic past and the ignominious present. The former evokes the martial glories of the young Republic *O soldats de l'an deux! o guerres! épopées!* In contrast to those heroes who confronted all the kings of Europe, the men of 1851 are pitiful indeed *O soldats de décembre! o soldats d'embuscades* Since these men are incapable of restoring liberty and justice, Hugo offers to assume that task himself. Speaking like a prophet of old he exclaims:

O Dieu vivant, mon Dieu! prêtez-moi votre force,
Et, moi qui ne suis rien, j'entrerai chez ce Corse
Et chez cet inhumain,
Secouant mon vers sombre et plein de votre flamme,
J'entrerai là, Seigneur, la justice dans l'âme
Et le fouet à la main,

Et, retroussant ma manche ainsi qu'un belluaire,
Seul, terrible, des morts agitant le suaire
Dans ma sainte fureur,
Pareil aux noirs vengeurs devant qui l'on se sauve,
J'écraserai du pied l'antre et la bête fauve,
L'empire et l'empereur!

Hostile critics have seen in this conclusion evidence of puerile vanity. But the Biblical note which Hugo introduces gives these stanzas a dignity and majesty comparable to the great vision of the opening lines. To quote M. Berret more closely than be-

fore: "A conclusion of Biblical tenor recalls the epic majesty of the beginning and gives the poem a quality of prophetic invective."

"L'Expiation" is better known and still more justly celebrated. Composed for the most part in 1852, this magnificent poem is a skillful blending of both epic and satiric themes. It opens with the glories of Napoleon I; it closes with a picture of the grotesque side show of Napoleon III. It achieves unity of composition by making this ignoble Second Empire the expiation of Napoleon I for the crime of the *Dix-huit Brumaire*. On that date of the revolutionary calendar (corresponding to November 9, 1799) Napoleon Bonaparte began his own *coup d'État* which brought about the abolition of the Directory and the institution of the Consulate. He expiates this crime, not by the retreat from Moscow, not by the defeat of Waterloo, not even by his exile at Saint Helena, but by seeing his great name made ridiculous by his petty and infamous nephew. In this way Hugo passes from the epic to the satiric and welds the poem into an organic whole.

The first three sections of the poem are devoted to the three great catastrophes just mentioned. For epic poetry is not necessarily based on success. The death of Roland and Oliver at Roncevaux with the complete destruction of the rear guard which they led gives the *Chanson de Roland* a grandeur that no victory could surpass. Here, too, Napoleon is great even in defeat. Misfortune merely heightens the effect, for it arouses a sympathy which victory would leave entirely dormant.

The picture of the retreat from Moscow has been sometimes compared to the pictures of Meissonier. In fact, Hugo paints with a more vigorous brush, if he has the precision of Meissonier, he has far greater sweep. In both the rigor of a winter campaign is admirably suggested. Hugo depicts with consummate skill the implacable curtain of falling snow. *Il neigeait*. These two simple words which open the poem are effectively repeated during the first thirty or forty lines till the reader

feels with Napoleon that destiny has taken a hand in this mighty conflict. The Grande Armée in its grim struggle with the Russians and the elements becomes something less than human:

Ce n'étaient plus des cœurs vivants, des gens de guerre,
C'était un rêve errant dans la brume, un mystère,
Une procession d'ombres sous le ciel noir

Admirable lines, not only in their pictorial effect, but in their emotional quality as well. Finally Napoleon realizes that this is no ordinary catastrophe. He senses that with this army disappearing in the snow and in the night, he is perhaps expiating some crime. Is this his punishment? A voice is heard to answer: *No*.

The second part evokes the battle of Waterloo, taken at the height of the conflict. It is a picture ablaze with color contrasting with the preceding shroud of white. But this color is nonetheless deadly. In the flames of battle Frenchmen die, in this *gouffre flamboyant* the Empire founders. In this rout which overcomes the veterans of all the imperial campaigns the fortunes of Napoleon meet another terrible disaster. Here again Hugo finds unforgettable words to depict the scene. When the Imperial Guard is thrown into the battle, he says.

Leur bouche, d'un seul cri, dit: vive l'Empereur!
Puis, à pas lents, musique en tête, sans fureur,
Tranquille, souriant à la mitraille anglaise,
La garde impériale entre dans la fournaise

Again, when the tide of battle has definitely turned and the soldiers of Napoleon learn the bitter lesson of utter defeat, he writes:

En un clin d'œil,
Comme s'envole au vent une paille enflammée,
S'évanouit ce bruit qui fut la grande armée

Once again Napoleon is forced to the question: is this the punishment? For a second time a voice is heard to answer: *No*.

Few men could be better fitted than Victor Hugo to depict the drama and tragedy of Napoleon's exile at Saint Helena which constitutes the third epic fragment. The poet's fondness for antithesis stands him here in good stead, for the contrast between the past glory of Napoleon and his new status as the prisoner of Sir Hudson Lowe is, indeed, a dramatic one. Hugo's own exile on an island also contributed to his understanding of Napoleon's position.

Évanouissement d'une splendeur immense!
Du soleil qui se lève à la nuit qui commence,
Toujours l'isolement, l'abandon, la prison,
Un soldat rouge au seuil, la mer à l'horizon,
Des rochers nus, des bois affreux, l'ennui, l'espace,
Des voiles s'enfuyant comme l'espoir qui passe,
Toujours le bruit des flots, toujours le bruit des vents!

The tragedy of Napoleon's downfall and exile are admirably suggested in these lines. They sharpen the bitterness of the details which follow: the memory of Moscow burning, the infidelity of his wife, the irritating and petty surveillance to which Hudson Lowe subjected him. As death comes upon him on this rocky isle Napoleon for a third time is forced to the question: is this the punishment? The voice replies: *Not yet*.

Thirty years later enlightenment finally came. Napoleon is awakened in his tomb by a voice he recognizes at once. Here is the punishment: to see his great name dragged in the mud by his nephew

Tu mourus, comme un astre se couche,
Napoléon le Grand, empereur, tu renaîs
Bonaparte, écuyer du cirque Beauharnais

Such is Napoleon's atonement for his crime of usurpation.

In composing this extraordinary poem Victor Hugo made use of a variety of sources. For the retreat from Moscow there was, first of all, oral tradition to guide him. He had undoubtedly heard many a narrative told by his uncle, General Louis Hugo.

He had also consulted written documents: Chateaubriand's dramatic pictures in his pamphlet, *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons* and in his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*; the Comte de Ségur's *Histoire de Napoléon et de la Grande Armée en 1812*; Napoleon's own memories in the *Papiers de Sainte-Hélène*. For the satirical picture of the Second Empire he had been partly influenced by political caricatures of the period of the Second Republic which more than once depicted Louis Napoleon as a charlatan. But above all he relied on his own imagination and genius. For this poem is no mosaic of documentary sources calculatingly put together. It contains, as M. Berret so admirably puts it,

a formidable concentration of all the grandeurs of the waning imperial epic, an uninterrupted dramatic movement, a tragic march toward the fatality of the ineluctable punishment, the repetition of the three noes gives the drama a new impetus after each scene and creates its unity, the bitter satire of the dénouement by its deliberate triviality and grotesqueness establishes a moving contrast with the first part and underlines its nobility and majesty

It is, in short, a truly great poem of its kind

Besides these compositions of epic stature we find in *Les Châtiments* poems of a far different mold and tone. A grimly realistic *tableau*, universally admired, bears the title of "Souvenir de la nuit du 4" and relates an episode witnessed by Hugo himself in the days following the *coup d'État*.² The first line, "L'enfant avait reçu deux balles dans la tête" with its stark directness sets the tone. The modest *intérieur*, the simple grandmother, her despair, the silence of the onlookers, all lead up to the eloquent and bitter denunciation of Napoleon III at the end. On the other hand, we find poems where lightness and grace are the conspicuous qualities, skillfully placed at the service of political satire. Not many poets are capable of such an achievement. Hugo performs it in texts like "Le Manteau

² A prose account will be found in the *Histoire d'un crime*. See also the preceding chapter.

impérial," "Floréal," "Stella," and "Le Chasseur noir" of which the first is the most famous. The imperial cloak — chosen for the coronation (le sacre) of the first Napoleon and re-adopted by his nephew — was decorated with golden bees, symbols of duty, virtue, and industry. Hugo bids them, these "chaste drinkers of the dew," these "daughters of light," these "wings of gold and darts of flame," to abandon this cloak, no longer a suitable setting for them. The proper decoration for the cloak of Napoleon III is not the bees of Hymetta but the black vultures of Montfaucon.³ The poem is written in rapid, light octosyllabic lines which contrast with the resounding alexandrines appropriate to most of *Les Châtiments*. It needs to be read aloud, like many of Hugo's compositions, to be fully appreciated.

In "Floréal" and "Stella," as in a good many other poems of this collection, external nature plays an important rôle. We have already seen it in "Nox" and M. Berret has called attention to the fact. It needs to be emphasized, for it contributes not a little to the beauty and originality of the whole publication. Sometimes, as in "Floréal," Hugo uses external nature for contrast: nature is beautiful and good, only the Second Empire is vile. Sometimes, as in "Stella," nature is identical with the poet's hope for the future, a symbol of liberty. Again it supplies a comparison which aids and strengthens the satire. Here for instance is a stanza from a poem which flays clerical-minded journalists (*A des journalistes de robe courte*):

Dieu prédestine aux dents des chevreaux les brins d'herbe,
La mer aux coups de vent, les donjons aux boulets,
Aux rayons du soleil les parthénons superbes,
Vos faces aux larges soufflets.⁴

Rarely, if ever, have blades of grass, the wind, and the sunbeams been used for such an unexpectedly ironical effect.

³ Famous in the Middle Ages and Renaissance for its gallows

⁴ The poem was written before the exile. Hugo had particularly in mind Louis Veuillot who wrote in the ultra-Catholic paper, *L'Univers*

More conventionally, external nature supplies a setting, a background in which the poet places a group or a narrative. In "La Caravane" it surrounds a group of travelers who represent humanity marching toward the future, and it provides a background for the appearance of the lion, "le roi sauvage et roux des profondeurs muettes," symbol of the anger of the people when aroused by oppression. Somewhat similarly in "Cette nuit, il pleuvait" . . . the narrative of a minor shipwreck in a stormy sea permits the poet to evoke a greater catastrophe, the shipwreck of French liberty. The ocean returns repeatedly, it will be noticed, in Hugo's lines. He is still the man who wrote "Oceano Nox" and he has now at Jersey constantly before him the spectacle of the sea. *Toujours le bruit des flots, toujours le bruit des vents*

So by every conceivable metaphor and comparison Louis Napoleon is ridiculed and flayed by the author of *Les Châtiments*. And with him, of course, his coterie Morny, Maupas, Fould, Rouher, Sibour, Dupin, Troplong, Saint-Amand, are leading France, in Hugo's eyes, down a path of degradation and ruin. Many of these men were his personal enemies, adversaries with whom he had clashed in the parliamentary conflicts of 1849 to 1851. Dupin, for example, the presiding officer of the Assembly, had more than once victimized Hugo with his irony. He is bitterly denounced and in the poem entitled "L'Autre Président" Hugo takes pleasure in showing this man's supineness at the moment of the *coup d'État*. Similarly, Montalembert, who had accused Hugo of apostasy, is flayed in spite of his recent break with the new emperor. Too late! says Hugo in "A un qui veut se détacher". "Toi, leur chef, sois leur chef! c'est là ton châtement." There is no escape possible for the artisans of this dishonor.

Pillory after pillory is thus erected to make that *épopée* which Hugo had announced at the end of "Nox". The book burns with an indignation, a holy wrath which almost makes one recoil at the distance of nearly a hundred years. Small

wonder that Émile Deschanel was able to write to Hugo in 1853: "I have just read *Les Châtiments*. How well they are named! How horrible and beautiful! All Brussels is stirred. . . . Ah! now we are avenged no matter what happens"

But, in addition to satire, *Les Châtiments* contained a pledge. In "Ultima verba" Hugo stated categorically that as long as the ignominious régime endured, he would not set foot in France:

Oui, tant qu'il sera là, qu'on cède ou qu'on persiste,
O France! France aimée et qu'on pleure toujours,
Je ne reverrai pas ta terre douce et triste,
Tombeau de mes aïeux et nid de mes amours!

J'accepte l'âpre exil, n'eût-il ni fin ni terme,
Sans chercher à savoir et sans considérer
Si quelqu'un a plié qu'on aurait cru plus ferme
Et si plusieurs s'en vont qui devraient demeurer

Si l'on n'est plus que mille, eh bien, j'en suis! Si même
Ils ne sont plus que cent, je brave encor Sylla,
S'il en demeure dix, je serai le dixième,
Et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là!

These admirable lines with their simplicity, energy, and purity of diction have, indeed, as even Hugo's bitterest critic admits, "a royal stride." Nor are they idle words. In them a free man resolutely faces a crisis, and with the full dignity of an untrammelled conscience takes his stand. Even those who may not like Hugo must admire his decision and above all the fidelity with which he clung to it. In spite of every pressure and temptation he steadfastly refused to yield and endured for nineteen years this "harsh exile" from his native land.

Before 1933 many critics used to find "Ultima verba" theatrical and pretentious. Today, since the advent of the Hitlerian government, we understand it much better. Victor Hugo was the Thomas Mann of his time, and, like all who develop a faith and suffer for a cause, he was a more impressive figure than

before. Back in 1840, Léon Durocher, writing on *Les Rayons et les ombres* in *Le National*, had criticized Hugo for remaining above the mêlée and obstinately refusing to take sides. Such an attitude lead to "perpetual negation" and to the "timid, but formal cult of a detestable juste-milieu"⁸ "We are beginning to understand," the critic concluded, "that faith alone produces great works" *Les Châtiments* are a clear-cut proof of that contention, they have a passion and power which Hugo's previous poetry lacked.

Meanwhile life in Jersey continued Victor Hugo saw a good deal of the many exiles gathered on the island They did not have the resource of creative literature to occupy their idle moments, and they became pathetic in their purely verbal plots for the overthrow of the usurper, plots which never were or could be transformed into reality In 1854 they all, including Victor Hugo, were outraged by the alliance of England with the dictator, and they hoped that the Crimean War which soon broke out would lead to Napoleon's discomfiture and even to his downfall. These hopes were vain, for, in spite of threatening disaster, French and British arms managed to win some victories and to impose a peace which checked the westward advance of Russia

To celebrate this event Queen Victoria decided to go to Paris Napoleon had visited England earlier in the year. She would return the compliment and solidify the alliance

Victor Hugo had denounced Napoleon's visit to England in a famous *Lettre à Louis Bonaparte* in which he sarcastically asked whether the emperor was going to England to obtain a Garter, then added "En effet, c'est jusque-là que vous avez du sang" (In truth you are knee-deep in blood) Now Victoria's return visit alarmed and depressed him But for once he kept silence Far less discreet were his fellow exiles. Felix Pyat wrote a "Letter to Queen Victoria" which was printed both in

⁸ *Le National*, August 11, 1840

London and in Jersey. On the island it appeared in a little newspaper, *L'Homme*, which was published by some of the exiles. The letter closed with bitter words

You have sacrificed everything — your dignity as a Queen, your womanly scruples, your aristocratic pride, your English sentiment, your rank, your sex, even your modesty — for the sake of your new ally!

This was too much for the citizens of Jersey. A meeting of protest was held, and the next day the editors of *L'Homme* were notified to leave the island

At once Victor Hugo came to his friends' support. He drew up a *Declaration* in which he accused the English of submitting to pressure from the French government ("Fouché's hand can put on Castlereagh's glove") and warned that England would soon be "an annex of the French empire." Thirty-five exiles joined Hugo in signing this document.

The Jersey authorities were not slow in taking up the challenge. On October 27, 1855 a constable appeared at Marine Terrace and informed Victor Hugo that the Lieutenant Governor ordered him and his two sons to leave the island within a week. Charles Hugo has preserved in *Les Hommes de l'exil* the amusing dialogue that followed in which Hugo wrung from this poor constable the admission that freedom of speech was being violated by these expulsions. All, of course, to no effect, for the constable had his orders and was without authority to change them. On October 31, 1855, accompanied by François-Victor, the poet left Jersey and took refuge on the near-by island of Guernsey whose authorities accepted him on condition that he should not interfere in English politics. At Saint Peter's Port a small crowd gathered at the dock paid him a silent but gratifying tribute by uncovering their heads as he stepped ashore.

CHAPTER X

GUERNSEY AND "LES CONTEMPLATIONS," 1856

Homo sum humani nihil a me
alienum puto — TERENCE

A FEW months after arriving at Saint Peter's Port, Victor Hugo bought a house, for he was weary of hired lodgings. Marine Terrace had never warmed his heart. It was, he wrote, a "heavy, white cube with sharp corners," and seemed like "a tomb"; it was completely white, and "nothing is so glacial as this English whiteness, it seems to offer you the hospitality of the snow." Hauteville House, his new residence in Guernsey (now a shrine for all *Hugolâtres*) was quite different. Its exterior was, to be sure, gray and sober. But inside it soon became the reflection of Victor Hugo's ardent personality, he filled it with medieval and Renaissance furniture, tapestries and statuettes, pictures of all kinds — many by himself — embroidered screens, and a multitude of curios of every description. The house has been described many times and we need not here look into its every room. One or two will suffice. The dining-room, for example, is famous for its fireplace and mantel of Delft tiles fashioned in the form of a large H. Within the upper arms of the H was an old painting representing a Madonna and Child. The Infant held a globe between his hands, and there was a quatrain which read

Le peuple est petit, mais il sera grand
Dans tes bras sacrés, o mère féconde,
O céleste Sainte, au pas conquérant,
Tu portes l'enfant qui porte le monde

Accompanied by a Latin verse, *Libertas populum, populus dum sustinet orbem*, the quatrain made the Virgin Mary a symbol

of Liberty. At the other end of the dining-room was a tremendous Gothic armchair, dubbed by the poet *sella patrum defunctorum*, or ancestral chair, with the inscription *Ego Hugo* conspicuous on its back. It was never used at mealtime, but stood there significantly empty. The salon on the second floor was another famous room and extraordinarily ornate. Its ceiling and walls were covered with lamé, said to have been originally worked for Queen Christina of Sweden. There were four large gilded statues supporting a kind of canopy above the fireplace of this room, which was also decorated with ornate mirrors, a screen said to have been embroidered by Mme de Pompadour, and an ivory inlaid table once the property of Charles II of England. On the third floor was the Oak Gallery, partially carved by Hugo himself, and the "Chambre de Garibaldi" with its enormous Gothic bed. The Italian patriot never came to occupy it, but the room was nonetheless one of the famous rooms of the house.

Hugo lived and worked in a room at the top of the house, his famous "lookout" from which he could see Saint Peter's Port and a large expanse of salt water. This was a place for labor, not pleasure, and it was sober and bare. The poet did his writing on a very primitive desk. It was really nothing but a piece of wood large enough to hold a sheet of paper and an inkwell, and was attached to the wall. Hugo stood erect in front of it as he wrote. Every morning he spent several hours before this *tablette*, composing a minimum of a hundred lines of poetry or twenty pages of prose. In this same room was a low divan on which he slept. Hugo kept paper close by it so that if he woke up in the night he could easily write down whatever came into his mind. At six every morning cold water was brought to him. He bathed quickly, drank a cup or two of cold coffee, and set to work.

Only a short distance from Hauteville House Juliette Drouet had quarters in a small cottage. Hugo saw her almost every day. Sometimes she accompanied him on his afternoon walks

on the island, for he regularly took a two-hour tramp no matter what the weather, and he frequently took sea baths. Sometimes he dined with her instead of with his wife. Later, as we shall see, when Mme Hugo was away from home, Juliette came and presided over the poet's establishment.

The first work to come from the poet's pen after he moved to Guernsey was *Les Contemplations*. It was a deliberately complete contrast to *Les Châtiments*, as a letter from Hugo to Paul Meurice reveals "I think," he wrote, "that the moment would be favorable to publish a volume of calm verses. *Les Contemplations* after *Les Châtiments* After the red effect, a blue effect." Rarely did the poet's love of antithesis serve him better, for the new publication thus conceived and appearing so soon (April 23, 1856) after the vitriolic lines of 1853 gave concrete proof of the breadth of Hugo's talent.

Some of the new work had been composed at various times from 1834 to 1851 and held in reserve in the author's files for an appropriate volume. Much of it was penned during the two years 1854 and 1855. Let it be said at once, moreover, that the dates appearing in the printed volume are frequently not the dates of actual composition. A study of the manuscript has shown that Hugo changed the dates to conform with the general structure he adopted in this collection. For *Les Contemplations* were published in two volumes, the first entitled *Autrefois*; the second, *Aujourd'hui*. The dividing line is the death of Léopoldine in 1843. The first volume is supposed to contain poems composed before the tragedy, the second, poems written after the tragedy. Hostile critics have made much of the fact that Hugo antedated so many poems, but if anyone had a right to do so it was certainly the man who composed them. Furthermore, the poet had a legitimate purpose. What he wanted to do, as M. Levaillant well says, was "to inscribe the dates of his memories — those which he bore engraved in his soul or which emphasized the stages of his life — not those dates of 1854 and 1855 when he evoked them."

Les Contemplations should, therefore, be read, in Hugo's own phrase, as the *Mémoires d'une âme*. They are primarily personal poems, intensely lyrical in tone and content. Indeed, for most competent critics they are not only Victor Hugo's masterpiece in the domain of lyric poetry, but they are one of the great lyric masterpieces of the nineteenth century. In 1856, to be sure, critics like Planche, Caro, de Pontmartin, and Laurent-Pichat mingled some blame with their praise. Hugo's great triumph really came years later when men like Guyau, Renouvier, and Gregh saluted his genius. Brunetière himself was forced to call *Les Contemplations* "the most lyrical *recueil* in the French language"

But while the *Contemplations* are essentially personal, they are by no means limited to the personality of the author. In a larger sense they deal with nothing less than human destiny. *Homo sum*, said Hugo in his preface, leaving the balance of Terence's famous statement unexpressed but clearly understood: *humani nihil a me alienum puto* ("I consider that nothing that is human is alien to me"). Here is the key to the inspiration of *Les Contemplations* and to the interest which they hold for the reader of 1856 or of today. The common experiences and the common sentiments of men are seen or felt in these poems which relate the experiences or confess the sentiments of Victor Hugo.

To put it a little differently and in more directly Hugolian terms, God and man is the constant subject of the collection. The first poem, "Un jour je vis," which serves as a prelude to the two volumes, already suggests this dual and fundamental theme. For in this text the poet standing by the sea beholds a ship sailing by, and he hears a voice telling him that

La mer, c'est le Seigneur, que, misère ou bonheur,
Tout destin montre et nomme,
Le vent, c'est le Seigneur, l'astre, c'est le Seigneur,
Le navire, c'est l'homme

Composed in 1839, the poem shows by its date the poet's long preoccupation with the condition and destiny of man under

the will of God. It is, therefore, a fitting introduction to *Les Contemplations* of 1856.

Once again, as in earlier volumes, the reader is impressed by the variety of the poetic inspiration. The great lyric themes of nature, love, and death are naturally present. But, in addition, a number of poems are devoted to purely literary (almost technical) matters. "Réponse à un acte d'accusation" which recalls the Romantic revolution of the twenties ("Je mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire") is the best known of this group. The problem of the poet's mission, an allied subject, inspires still another. Several poems, including "Melancholia" and "Chose vue un jour de printemps" prove, if such proof were necessary, that Hugo's humanitarianism is still alive and functioning. Another group, headed by "La Fête chez Thérèse" and "Le Rouet d'Omphale," reminds us that the poet's genius is not merely lyrical. The former, inspired by a costume party offered by Léonie Biard¹ and her husband is a delightful pictorial poem after the manner of a Watteau painting, and is considered to be a precursor of Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*. "Le Rouet d'Omphale," essentially plastic is Hugo's contribution to the homage paid during the 1840's to ancient Greece. Above all, we have in *Les Contemplations* several poems of genuinely philosophical content, not merely poems inspired by death and revealing the poet's emotion, but poems which raise in an intellectual and abstract way the great problems which have long interested thoughtful men: the origin of evil, the nature of God, the destiny of man. Political themes are absent from this collection, they had been amply treated in *Les Châtiments*.

This range of subject and inspiration, showing that while Hugo did not turn his back on romanticism, he nevertheless went beyond its limitations, is interesting if only for the contrast it provides to the poetic ideas and doctrines expressed by Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and Maxime Du Camp.

¹ This interpretation has been contested by M. Paul Souchon in the *Mercur de France*, May 1, 1939.

during the preceding three or four years. In 1852 Gautier had published his *Émaux et Camées* and Leconte de Lisle his *Poèmes antiques*. Both men rejected romantic lyricism, and, as the titles imply, sought other themes to exploit; Gautier chose subjects of essentially sculptural or pictorial interest, Leconte de Lisle delved into the remote past. Both men believed in objectivity in art and were united in their opposition to the utilitarian. They were, in short, adherents of Art for Art's sake. Maxime Du Camp, on the other hand, while rejecting romanticism, refused to follow the lead of Gautier and Leconte de Lisle. Publishing in 1855 *Les Chants modernes* — the very title is a reply to the *Poèmes antiques* — he declared that the miracles of modern science and industry should become an important source of poetic inspiration. He thus carried the doctrine of useful art to a logical extreme. Victor Hugo refused to enter either of these narrow exclusive roads, he obviously preferred to remain on a broad highway from which all horizons were readily perceptible. In this conviction he included in *Les Contemplations* the variety of themes and types of which we have spoken.

The love poems of *Les Contemplations* do not surpass the lyrics of similar theme in *Les Chants du crépuscule*, *Les Voix intérieures*, and *Les Rayons et les ombres*. Some of them were composed at approximately the same time. One, penned in 1834 and undoubtedly inspired by Juliette Drouet, is a charming little chanson in three stanzas, beginning with the line: "Mon bras pressait ta taille frêle." One wonders why it was not included in *Les Chants du crépuscule*. But it is not isolated in *Les Contemplations*. Hugo apparently liked this genre so well that he composed others, one of the most attractive being "Mes vers fuiraient, doux et frères." Whether this chanson was written for Juliette Drouet or Léonie Biard is uncertain, but its grace and harmony are beyond question. The same may be said of the song, "Si vous n'avez rien à me dire," composed for Juliette — this time there is no doubt — on July 12, 1846, the

day after the funeral of her daughter, Claire Pradier. But neither Juliette nor Léonie can claim to have inspired the most sensual poem of the collection, "Elle était déchaussée, elle était décoiffée," which has been universally admired as a little poetic jewel. Composed in 1853, the identity of the girl remains a mystery.

These poems have been well called charming "petits riens." More substantial are "Paroles dans l'ombre" and "Sous les arbres," the first reflecting Juliette's discontent at her sequestration, the other her submission and humility. Juliette is also the central figure in the ultra-romantic "Je respire où tu palpites" and in "Un soir que je regardais le ciel." In the latter, Hugo's mistress says:

Ami, pourquoi contemplez-vous sans cesse
Le jour qui fuit, ou l'ombre qui s'abaisse,
Ou l'astre d'or qui monte à l'orient?
Que font vos yeux là-haut? je les réclame
Quittez le ciel, regardez dans mon âme

The sentiment may seem exaggerated, especially when one remembers that Hugo, not Juliette, was writing the words, but the lines are indubitably beautiful.

Love poetry, however charming, is still a minor theme in *Les Contemplations*. Far more important are the poems devoted to external nature and those inspired by the poet's daughter and her premature death. Nature, of course, plays a part in almost every composition of the book, but it is also a major theme in itself, engendering such magnificent poems as "Aux arbres," "Paroles sur la dune," "Mugitusque boum," and "Pasteurs et troupeaux." It also accounts for a poem like "Crépuscule" in which Hugo, rejecting all eloquence, becomes, as Professor Peyre says so well, "the great singer of the mystery and vibration of things, of growth and change, and of the secrets of a world in ebullition."

M. Vianey has listed possible literary sources of many of these nature poems. In the case of "Aux arbres," for instance,

Hugo may well have been familiar with Victor de Laprade's "A un grand arbre" (1841) and "La Mort d'un chêne" (1842), and he doubtless knew Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's meditation on the forest as well as Rousseau's Letter to Malesherbes in which he explains that he goes into the forest to flee man and finds God. Other possible sources may be Lamartine's "Le Chêne" or the apostrophe to the fir trees in *Jocelyn*. To all which must be added Ronsard's "De l'élection de son sépulcre." But if we mention these sources it is only to emphasize the fact, as M. Vianey too maintains, that Hugo's poem is nonetheless original, for it fuses into a magnificent whole elements which had remained more or less isolated in the work of his predecessors. It is not merely the great trees of the forest with their *rameaux palpitants*, their leaves trembling at the branch tips, their shade, and their mystery which the poet depicts, but also the sounds and the movements of the forest. Like Victor de Laprade, Hugo declares that the forest brings him serenity: *Vous savez que je suis calme . . . comme vous*. One regrets that he also declared himself to be as pure as the trees, for the complete line reads *Vous savez que je suis calme et pur comme vous*. But that is really the only reservation to be made in praising this poem which contains extraordinarily resonant and evocative lines.

Arbres de ces grands bois qui frissonnez toujours,
 Je vous aime, et vous, lierre au seuil des antres sourds,
 Ravins où l'on entend filtrer les sources vives,
 Buissons que les oiseaux pillent, joyeux convives!
 Quand je suis parmi vous, arbres de ces grands bois,
 Dans tout ce qui m'entoure et me cache à la fois,
 Dans votre solitude où je rentre en moi-même,
 Je sens quelqu'un de grand qui m'écoute et qui m'aime!

None of Hugo's predecessors had surpassed or even equaled this rendition

In most of these poems nature is beneficent, with the possible exception of the sea whose destructive fury Hugo rarely for-

gets. But in "Paroles sur la dune" nature does not console. For once Hugo's innate optimism gives way to an overpowering sadness which recalls the early attitude of Lamartine. Indeed, this poem has been compared with Lamartine's "Le Vallon." But if we perceive here some of the same lassitude and disillusionment, we fail to find, as M. Vianey points out, the healing force of nature. Even the moon, usually a symbol of serenity in Hugo's poetry, is sinister on this occasion. For Hugo was writing on August 5, 1854, the second anniversary of his arrival in Jersey, and his melancholy is, therefore, quite understandable. The poem is, then, the reflection of an inner mood which even a beautiful setting is powerless to modify. It is, moreover, expressed in accents peculiarly Hugo's own.

A few months later much the same landscape, reinforced by reminiscences of Vergil, produced a very different effect. "Mugitusque boum" is a nature poem as confident, as serene, and as optimistic as "Paroles sur la dune" was the reverse. The principal literary source is obviously a line of Vergil's *Georgics* (II, 470) which provides the title. It was a text Hugo had long admired. In *Le Rhin* he had already quoted it with approval: "I had just read those admirable and eternal lines. 'Mugitusque boum mollesque sub arbore somni. . . ' My soul was full of all the vague, gentle, and sad ideas which are ordinarily mingled in my mind with the beams of the setting sun." M. Vianey thinks that Hugo also remembered a passage from Chateaubriand's *Atala* and George Sand's *La Mare au diable* which gave him the idea of the *grands fantômes noirs des arbres de la plaine* (the tenth line of the poem). But it is unwise to exaggerate here the importance of the literary sources. Whatever they may be, Hugo has composed a masterpiece, the central thought of which is certainly his own. The serene beauty of nature suggests to men of all ages — in Hugo's day as in Vergil's — that it is good to live, to cultivate the earth, to love. This is not, of course, a new idea, and hostile critics would doubtless condemn it as banal. A more impartial ver-

dict is that Hugo has expressed a universal truth in perfect lines.

Composed at the beginning of winter (in December 1854), "Pasteurs et troupeaux" is a poem celebrating the Jersey spring. More accurately it gives us two aspects of nature: the valley of Grouville (located at about fifteen minutes' walk from Marine Terrace) full of flowers and birds, and the harsh, somber sea. Dedicated to Madame Louise Colet, a faithful friend and admirer, the poem begins in a calm, informal way.

Le vallon où je vais tous les jours est charmant,
Serein, abandonné, seul sous le firmament,
Plein de ronces en fleurs, c'est un sourire triste

The poet describes his promenade, evokes the finches and the warblers. He meets a little girl tending her goats and sheep. He continues his walk, and twilight falls:

Le crépuscule étend sur les longs sillons gris
Ses ailes de fantôme et de chauve-souris

Then comes the final dramatic picture:

Et là-bas, devant moi, le vieux gardien pensif
De l'écume, du flot, de l'algue, du récif,
Et des vagues sans trêve et sans fin remuées,
Le pâtre promontoire au chapeau de nuées,
S'accoude et rêve au bruit de tous les infinis,
Et dans l'ascension des nuages bénis,
Regarde se lever la lune triomphale,
Pendant que l'ombre tremble, et que l'âpre rafale
Disperse à tous les vents avec son souffle amer
La laine des moutons sinistres de la mer

Renouvier declares that such effects as these are of a very special order of the sublime which he defines as a "particular ravishment that lifts one's consciousness above the relations and comparisons in which the ordinary material of the beautiful lies." The unexpected contrast, the eloquent metaphors so unusually linked together, the chiaroscuro produced by the ris-

ing moon over the dim and shadowy landscape, these visual effects combine with the intellectual elements — the *triumphant* moon, symbol of the victory of goodness, and the harsh squall sending in every direction the sinister waves of the sea, symbol of destruction — to create a unique impression

Such are some of the nature poems of Hugo's maturity, and while it is true that they do not contain a consistent philosophy of nature, for the poet's interpretation tends to vary with his changing moods, it is also clear that Brunetière's charge that Hugo had no genuine feeling for nature is absurd. His accusation was based in part on the emphasis Hugo placed on the destructive force of the sea. True, Hugo was frequently impressed by its sinister fury. But we should not fail to record other impressions. Here is a beautiful twilight scene in which the ocean is an essential element:

Le jour mourait, j'étais près des mers, sur la grève

Les nuages rampaient le long des promontoires,
Mon âme, où se mêlaient ces ombres et ces gloires
Sentait confusément

De tout cet océan, de toute cette terre,
Sortir sous l'œil de Dieu je ne sais quoi d'austère,
D'auguste et de charmant!

"Magnitudo parvi"

The fact is that few poets have so well rendered the beauties of external nature as the author of "Tristesse d'Olympio." Nor did he depict them in an exclusively objective way.

Arbres de ces grands bois qui frissonnez toujours,
Je vous aime

Such a confession, by its very simplicity and directness, should be and for impartial critics is convincing. It is confirmed in every passage of Hugo's poems which speaks of external nature in simple and non-rhetorical terms.

La nuit vint, tout se tut; les flambeaux s'éteignirent;
 Dans les bois assombris les sources se plaignirent,
 Le rossignol, caché dans son nid ténébreux,
 Chanta comme un poète et comme un amoureux
 "La Fête chez Thérèse"

There is little eloquence or rhetoric in these lines. They could have been composed only by a man with a "genuine feeling for nature." Critics like Brunetière are prejudiced, persuaded in advance, as Jean-Marie Guyau charged, that Hugo "inevitably says something foolish as soon as he opens his mouth," that "any idea of Hugo's must be commonplace."

Nature, then, plays an important rôle in most of *Les Contemplations*. Above all does it do so in the poems inspired by the tragic death of Léopoldine, and placed under the collective title of *Pauca meae*.² Seventeen poems, composed between 1841 and 1855, constitute this group. They contain the expression of the poet's despair ("Oh! je fus comme fou dans le premier moment" and "Veni, vidi, vixi"), of his submission ("A Villequier"), of his belief, in spite of everything, in immortality ("A quoi songeaient les deux cavaliers dans la forêt" and "Mors"). They also give us touching and charming pictures of Léopoldine ("Elle avait pris ce pli dans son âge enfantin" and "Elle était pâle et pourtant rose") which again demonstrate Hugo's supremacy in this particular genre of childhood poetry.

The best known and greatest poem of *Pauca meae* is unquestionably "A Villequier," one of the major poems, I was going to say of French Romanticism, but it is more accurate to say of French literature. It has been read, studied, and admired so much that quite understandably the French today are a little weary of it and tend to avoid it in favor of less known texts from Hugo's fertile pen. It is still a great poem, uniting not only two traditional elegiac forms (that of Lamartine's "L'Isole-

² *Pauca carmina meae filiae*, a few songs for my daughter. Suggested by Vergil's *Bucolics*, X, ll 2-3.

ment" and Malherbe's "Consolation à Du Périer sur la mort de sa fille"), but also several great lyric themes: nature, death, religious sentiment, paternal love and grief. Its Biblical simplicity of language, here and there particularly suggestive of the Book of Job, corresponds to the solemnity of the subject. Louis Veuillot, the ultra-Catholic critic and a bitter enemy of Victor Hugo, while criticizing adversely some parts of the poem, declared after quoting others that "no more beautiful verses exist in the French language, nor in the Christian tongue." Edmond Biré, another enemy, calls "A Villequier" altogether "admirable." Even Mr. Giese, the most vituperative of Hugo's critics in this country, considers the elegies of *Pauca meae* "profoundly moving for their dolorous sincerity and the utter abandonment to despair which they so eloquently record."

Most of the poem was composed on September 4, 1844, the first anniversary of Léopoldine's death, and in all probability at Villequier itself where Hugo was visiting his daughter's grave. Two years later, in October 1846, Hugo inserted several more stanzas. These additions tend, for the most part, to reinforce the elements of revolt and doubt which existed already in the original text. For this is not a poem of Christian resignation. Hugo manages to submit to the will of God, but he does not succeed in achieving resignation. "My heart is submissive," he says, "but is not resigned."

The poem opens with the much admired lines

Maintenant que Paris, ses pavés et ses marbres,
Et sa brume et ses toits sont bien loin de mes vœux,
Maintenant que je suis sous les branches des arbres,
Et que je puis songer à la beauté des cieux,

Maintenant que du deuil qui m'a fait l'âme obscure
Je sors, pâle et vainqueur,
Et que je sens la paix de la grande nature
Qui m'entre dans le cœur,

Je viens à vous, Seigneur! confessant que vous êtes
Bon, clément, indulgent et doux, ô Dieu vivant!
Je conviens que vous seul savez ce que vous faites,
Et que l'homme n'est rien qu'un jonc qui tremble au vent,

Je conviens à genoux que vous seul, père auguste,
Possédez l'infini, le réel, l'absolu,
Je conviens qu'il est bon, je conviens qu'il est juste
Que mon cœur ait saigné, puisque Dieu l'a voulu!

This seems indeed to be Christian resignation, expressed in simple and moving terms. But it is followed by lines which are more Cartesian than Christian in their thought, for Hugo expresses the view that the world is a great mechanism which moves according to immutable laws never upset or set aside by God, that "creation is a great wheel which cannot stir without crushing some one." Or, as he again says.

Nos destins ténébreux vont sous des lois immenses
Que rien ne déconcerte et que rien n'attendrit
Vous ne pouvez avoir de subites clémences
Qui dérangent le monde, ô Dieu, tranquille esprit!

This intellectual effort is succeeded by an outburst of emotion in which the poet's heart dominates his mind. He is only human, and he claims the right to suffer and to protest. He claims above all the right to shed his tears.

Seigneur, je reconnais que l'homme est en délire
S'il ose murmurer,
Je cesse d'accuser, je cesse de maudire,
Mais laissez-moi pleurer!

From this point on, the lyric note of paternal grief predominates and leads to the profoundly moving and simple lines of conclusion.

Quand on a vu, seize ans, de cet autre soi-même
Croître la grâce aimable et la douce raison,
Lorsqu'on a reconnu que cet enfant qu'on aime
Fait le jour dans notre âme et dans notre maison,

Que c'est la seule joie ici-bas qui persiste
De tout ce qu'on rêva,
Considérez que c'est une chose bien triste
De le voir qui s'en va!

The poem, if I may use M. Levailant's phrase, is a "symphony of grief," magnificently orchestrated.

While "A Villequier" is the most famous poem of *Les Contemplations*, it is not, intellectually speaking, the most important. Beyond death loom the infinite and the unknown which Victor Hugo unhesitatingly scrutinizes. His natural tendency, stimulated by the table-tipping experiences in Jersey, led him "to the edge of the infinite." The final section of the book bears in fact that title *Au bord de l'infini* and contains the poet's religious philosophy at this date. It provides for the unbiased and careful reader a sufficient answer to the charge made by more than one critic that Hugo, while an admirable versifier, was devoid of ideas.

Jean-Marie Guyau put the question bluntly "Has Hugo a philosophy?" Not perhaps in the sense that Kant or Hegel had a philosophy, he frankly replies, but rather in the sense that Hugo's work contains a wealth of philosophic, moral, and social views. In that sense Guyau maintained that Hugo has a philosophy, and he adds that when one has become familiar with Hugo's philosophical ideas, then, and then only, many of his poems "take on their complete meaning, produce the fullness of their aesthetic effect." Renouvier entitled one of his volumes *Victor Hugo le philosophe*. The title assumes that the poet had ideas worth discussing, and nearly four hundred pages confirm that assumption.

Au bord de l'infini includes twenty-six poems introduced by "Le Pont" and "Ibo" which announce the poet's intention. The former reveals his aspiration to penetrate the unknown, suggesting that prayer may be the bridge leading to it. The second asserts his inflexible will to persevere in the pursuit of truth:

J'ai des ailes J'aspire au faite;
 Mon vol est sûr;
 J'ai des ailes pour la tempête
 Et pour l'azur.

Je gravis les marches sans nombre.
Je veux savoir;
 Quand la science serait sombre
 Comme le soir!

Descartes had proclaimed the same will and perseverance in his search for the truth But the author of "Ibo" will seek his philosophy, not as a mathematician and logician, but as a "songeur ailé," as a "mage effaré "

Je suis le poète farouche,
 L'homme devoir,
 Le souffle des douleurs, la bouche
 Du claron noir

This method, so remote from the Cartesian, is well adapted to Hugo's poetic and imaginative genius It will produce conceptions not less interesting because of their form

Two poems, "Horror" and "Dolor," raise the central question and provide a preliminary answer "Horror" is a pessimistic picture of the impenetrable mystery prevailing everywhere. It begins with an apostrophe of five stanzas addressed to the *esprit mystérieux*, that ghostly apparition which the *Journal de l'exil* tells us had been seen at Marine Terrace and which was identified in one of the table-tipping séances, so frequent during Hugo's sojourn on Jersey, as the Dame Blanche Then the poem proceeds to define the great problem confronting the poet Not only man flounders in doubt, the whole universe is shrouded in mystery:

La cendre ne sait pas ce que pense le marbre,
 L'écueil écoute en vain le flot, la branche d'arbre
 Ne sait pas ce que dit le vent.
 Qui punit-on ici? Passez sans vous connaître!
 Est-ce toi le coupable, enfant qui viens de naître?
 O mort, est-ce toi le vivant?

This pessimism of "Horror" is only momentary, for "Dolor" immediately replies:

Ah! vivants, vous doutez! ah! vous riez, squelettes!
 Lorsque l'aube apparaît, ceinte de bandes
 D'or, d'émeraude et de carmin,
 Vous huez, vous prenez, larves que le jour dore,
 Pour la jeter au front céleste de l'aurore,
 De la cendre dans votre main

Chaque fois qu'ici-bas l'homme, en proie aux désastres,
 Rit, blasphème, et secoue, en regardant les astres,
 Le sarcasme, ce vil lambeau,
 Les morts se dressent froids au fond du caveau sombre,
 Et de leur doigt de spectre écrivent — DIEU — dans l'ombre,
 Sous la pierre de leur tombeau

This belief in God is achieved through suffering, *Dolor*, and this expression of faith in the existence of God outweighs the skepticism of the previous poem

So far, these ideas are steeped in a banality which is relieved only by the poetic form. Fortunately *Au bord de l'infini* contains other, more interesting conceptions. The poem "Cadaver" in perfectly magnificent lines puts forward the notion of the metamorphosis of the human body. "The flesh says to itself. I shall be earth and germinate" (*La chair se dit je vais être terre et germer*). This was for Hugo, as it had been for Lamartine (in "Milly") and for Musset (in "La Nuit d'août") a consoling thought, and one which he pushed even farther. For some time the author of *Les Contemplations* had been intensely interested in pythagorism or the metempsychosis of souls. "Dolor" already contained the line

Soyons dignes,
 Corbeaux, hiboux, vautours, de redevenir cygnes!

In "Pleurs dans la nuit" we find the suggestion that even stones have souls, the souls of men who are being degraded. And "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre," the climactic poem of *Au bord*

de l'infini, contains not only this conception, but other essential elements of Hugo's philosophy in 1855.

Those who are skeptical of Hugo's abilities in the domain of philosophical poetry have not read "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" with care. The poem, an extraordinary combination of pythagorism, Platonism, pantheism, and the poet's personal optimism, has for its opening scene the dolmen of Rozel.³ There the poet meets a Specter who discourses on the problems confronting all philosophers. Everything lives, the Specter begins by saying.

Sache que tout connaît sa loi, son but, sa route,
Que de l'astre au ciron, l'immensité s'écoute,
Que tout a conscience en la création,
Et l'oreille pourrait avoir sa vision,
Car les choses et l'être ont un grand dialogue
Tout parle, l'air qui passe et l'alcyon qui vogue,
Le brin d'herbe, la fleur, le germe, l'élément
T'imaginais-tu donc l'univers autrement?

This idea of the essential unity and vitality of the universe, this notion that everything in creation is endowed with consciousness, Hugo had reached already, it will be remembered, in 1840. He now gives it a new and more vigorous expression, and makes it a basis for further development.

Whence came this universe? and whence came the *être impondérable*? God created the universe which he necessarily made imperfect, and he continues to exist in it, for God is everything and everything is a part of God.⁴ But if this conception of God is pantheistic (as it undoubtedly is), the explanation of the creation of the universe — Hugo's cosmogony, in other words — is closely allied to Cartesianism and, perhaps, if we accept the views of Saurat and Viatte, to occultism.

³ Not far from Marine Terrace. A number of these druidic stones existed on the island. Hugo was much interested in them.

⁴ Hugo's conception of God is complex. In spite of his pantheism he constantly speaks of a personal God without any apparent sense of contradiction.

Even though Hugo in "Ibo" announced a method of philosophical search quite different from the Cartesian, it is by no means impossible that his cosmogony harks back to Descartes' conception of the uniqueness of perfection: God, being perfect, cannot create a perfect universe, for He would merely reproduce Himself. Two perfections cannot exist, they would be self-contradictory, for the essence of perfection is oneness. Do we, therefore, need go beyond that and say with Saurat that Hugo, under the influence of his old friend Alexandre Weill (whom he had again seen in Brussels in 1852 and with whom he had probably discussed the manuscript of *Mystères de la création* which Weill published in 1855), adopted the Cabal's interpretation of the existence of evil? Was that also the source of Hugo's belief in metempsychosis? It is a tempting theory, and Professor Saurat argues persuasively in its behalf. Yet the evidence does not seem absolutely conclusive. The Cartesian explanation of evil is an equally obvious source for Hugo's ideas on that particular problem. As for his belief in metempsychosis, Charles Fourier's *Théorie de l'unité universelle* (1841) may have impressed him quite as much as the ideas of Alexandre Weill. We know from the *Journal de l'exil* that Hugo read it.

Of course, to admit that Fourier was a possible influence is to subscribe in part to M. Viatte's thesis of the importance of the "Illuminés" in Hugo's thinking. It is a complex problem. All we can say here is that while some such influence doubtless existed, the truth is, as M. Viatte freely admits, that Hugo always retained his intellectual independence. If he took ideas from the "Illuminés," it was in no servile fashion that he did so. He adopted what he pleased and rejected the rest.

However that may be, the next question for the poet is the nature of evil. As the cause of evil is lack of light (*clarté*) with resultant heaviness and darkness, evil itself is synonymous with matter.

Le mal, c'est la matière. Arbre noir, fatal fruit.

Man is conscious of this opposition between good and evil, between light and darkness. Within his human limitations he is free to choose between them:

L'être créé se meut dans la lumière immense.
Libre, il sait où le bien cesse, où le mal commence,
Il a ses actions pour juges

Il suffit

Qu'il soit méchant ou bon, tout est dit. Ce qu'on fit,
Crime, est notre geôlier, ou, vertu, nous délivre
L'être ouvre à son insu, de lui-même, le livre

Man, therefore, not only chooses his path, but creates his own punishment:

On agit, et l'on gagne ou l'on perd à mesure.

Dieu ne nous juge point. Vivant tous à la fois,
Nous pesons, et chacun descend selon son poids

Toute faute qu'on fait est un cachot qu'on s'ouvre

This Platonic idea Hugo has made emphatically his own and has expressed it in arresting fashion. These lines, says Guyau, "are a model of philosophic poetry. Exact in its formulas, yet colorful, it is not a rendering of ideas but an incarnation of ideas in which life arises from within to burst forth to the outside."

Once this concept of punishment is established, Hugo carries it out vigorously. The notion which he had merely suggested in "Pleurs dans la nuit" of the degradation of souls in a metamorphosed state becomes here a doctrine. Thus, like Dante in the *Inferno*, Victor Hugo judges certain well-known evil-doers and describes their chastisement.

Quand Dahila descend dans la tombe, un aspic
Sort des plis du linceul, emportant l'âme fausse

.

L'âme du noir Judas, depuis dix-huit cents ans,
Se disperse et renaît dans les crachats des hommes

Delilah an asp and Judas, spittle. These are at least picturesque punishments.

Of course Hugo recognizes that the degree of punishment should depend on the nature of the crime.

L'âme que sa noirceur chasse du firmament
 Descend dans les degrés divers du châtement
 Selon que plus ou moins d'obscurité la gagne
 L'homme en est la prison, la bête en est le bagne,
 L'arbre en est le cachot, la pierre en est l'enfer

To have one's soul enclosed in a stone is to suffer one of the worst punishments

Such is Hugo's conception of the origin of evil and its inevitable consequences. Hostile critics, like Edmond Biré, have found it easy to ridicule the poet's ideas, but they have won the respect of other minds at least equally competent.

Like Pascal, Victor Hugo recognizes the double nature of man:

L'homme est clémence et colère,
 Fond vil du puits, plateau radieux de la tour

Songeur, retiens ceci, l'homme est un équilibre
 L'homme est une prison où l'âme reste libre

This dualism leads to consequences on the ethical side which the poet has already analyzed. On the intellectual and spiritual side this dualism leads both to doubt and to faith (or hope). Doubt, in itself, is not all evil, for as even Pascal would say (though with different conclusions in view)

Douter est sa puissance et sa punition
 Il voit la rose, et nie, il voit l'aurore, et doute,
 Où serait le mérite à retrouver sa route,
 Si l'homme, voyant clair, roi de sa volonté,
 Avait la certitude, ayant la liberté?

Le doute le fait libre, et la liberté, grand

"It would be difficult," writes Renouvier, "to cite not only more beautiful lines, but philosophic formulas more happily expressed" than these.

The final word of the poem is *hope*.

Espérez! espérez! espérez! misérables!
 Pas de deuil infini, pas de maux incurables,
 Pas d'enfer éternel!

Light will overcome darkness *La clarté montera dans tout comme une sève*. Jesus will lead Belial to God An angel will appear and cry: *Commencement!* In that day the dualism admitted by the poet will vanish

Some things remained unexplained in "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" The poet does not tell us how the universe is to be led to light and love Apparently it will just happen But when such reservations have been made, when the obvious incoherences have been admitted, the ideas clearly expressed by Hugo are interesting and important, the poetic language in which they are clothed magnificent "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" is a poem that deserves to be better known and that testifies to the grandeur of Hugo's genius

The way to the ideal future, forecast but unplotted by the Specter, will perhaps be shown by the prophets. In "Les Mages" Hugo paid tribute to them, and he includes under this title all the great thinkers and poets of history Long before this date he had defined the poet's mission in terms we have already discussed In 1856 he reaffirms their rôle as guides for humanity and proclaims them to be interpreters of the mystery of the universe.

Ils ajoutent, rêveurs austères,
 A leur âme tous les mystères,
 Toute la matière à leur sens,
 Ils s'enivrent de l'étendue,
 L'ombre est une coupe tendue
 Où boivent ces sombres passants

Thirsting for the infinite, having nevertheless like other men to drink from the cup of darkness, these guiding minds — Shakespeare, Newton, Zoroaster, Homer, Franklin, Fulton, and many others, with princes and soldiers conspicuously absent — bring God to men

Ils émettent aux âmes Dieu

It is, therefore, justifiable to think that Hugo's philosophy includes the notion that evil will be finally overcome and that this ultimate victory will be in part the achievement of the Magi.

The mere form of this poem has won lavish praise. After quoting the first stanza, Brunetière says:

Such is the idea — if it be an idea — that in more than seven hundred lines Hugo will develop, with amplitude and diversity of movements, with fertility of verbal invention, with an incomparable richness, abundance, and splendor of imagery, without analogy or at least without equal even in his own work, and without superior perhaps in any language

As for the idea — the value of which Brunetière ironically questions — more than one interpretation has been made. Professor Saurat has gone to the sensational extreme of declaring that Hugo considered himself as the sacred founder of a new religion, a kind of second Jesus Christ.⁵ Other critics come to the more moderate conclusion that Hugo, as a great poet, looked upon himself legitimately enough as a sort of prophet for whom the Infinite and the Unknown were specially appropriate subjects of speculation. With this view one can more readily agree.

In any case can there be doubt, as one closes the pages of *Les Contemplations*, of the vigor of Hugo's thought, of the interest and value, if not the validity — which is always open to question in any philosophical system — of his religious and metaphysical ideas, and of the versatility and brilliance of his

⁵ Saurat, *La Religion de Victor Hugo* (Paris, Hachette, 1929), p. 198

poetic genius? *Les Contemplations* with their reflections on human destiny, with their songs, elegies, and odes, with their extraordinary variety of poetic themes, with their dazzling metaphors and contrasts of color are a permanent, living monument to the greatness of Hugo's art and to the vivacity of his intelligence.

CHAPTER XI

"LA LÉGENDE DES SIÈCLES," 1859

Qu'importent les scores qui se
mêlent à cette lave? Elles s'y con-
sument et s'y engloutissent

—LECONTE DE LISLE

HAUTEVILLE HOUSE was more than a residence, it was a workshop in which all the members of the household labored. François-Victor translated Shakespeare, Charles and Adèle Hugo gathered material for the *Journal de l'exil*, but they also went in for creative art, Charles being ambitious to write novels, and Adèle, music, their mother compiled a biography of her husband's career down to 1841 (largely at his dictation), Auguste Vacquerie tried his hand at plays. But none worked harder than Hugo himself who spent hours every day in his lookout pouring forth his regular assignment. There, in a fury of composition, he erected the tremendous edifice of *La Légende des siècles*.

The epic tone audible in certain poems of the *Odes et Ballades* and *Les Orientales*, more clearly heard in *Cromwell*, *Hernani*, *Ruy Blas*, and *Les Burgraves*, deeply resonant in more than one poem of *Les Châtiments*, reaches its climax in this new publication which brings Victor Hugo to the summit of his poetic career. We have seen that he is a great lyric poet. So it is an exaggeration to say, as some critics have, that his genius is essentially epic. But the grandiose and the forceful had a natural attraction for him. "Force enchants and intoxicates him," said Baudelaire with his customary insight. Recently M. Levaillant has put it more poetically: "His lyricism hastens toward the summits." Certainly this trait in Victor Hugo bore magnificent fruit, for *La Légende des siècles* is the greatest

epic poetry to appear in France since the demise of the medieval *chansons de geste*

Not that Victor Hugo was without rivals. Their number is far greater than is generally realized and the talent of several is sufficient to belie the oft-quoted dictum of Malezieux: "The French are not endowed with epic genius" That remark had a certain truth if applied merely to the eighteenth century in which it was uttered But obviously Malezieux spoke in ignorance of the *Chanson de Roland* and without any prophetic foresight of the literary production of the century to come At the threshold of the new century the writings of Chateaubriand helped bridge the gap between the past and the future, between Homer and Milton on the one hand, and the Romantics on the other And this in spite of the fact that his epic of nature (*Les Natchez*) and his epic of Christianity (*Les Martyrs*) were written in prose It was, to be sure, very poetic prose Of equal or greater importance for the development of the nineteenth-century epic were the theories he expressed in *Le Génie du christianisme* Then came André Chénier His works, though incomplete, made him a "herald of a Romantic age obsessed with the vision of an epic celebrating human perfectibility"¹ These precursors were followed by a goodly company which includes such names as Lamartine, Alfred de Vigny, Edgar Quinet, Alexandre Soumet, Victor de Laprade, Louis Ménard, and Louis Bouilhet, all of whom produced at least a portion of their epic verse before 1859

On the theoretical side Quinet is perhaps as important an influence on Victor Hugo as Lamartine and Vigny on the creative Originally Quinet had gone to school to Victor Hugo, for some of the former's ideas undoubtedly derive from the *Préface de Cromwell*. But when he says, as early as 1828, that the poet should "bring together real people across the centuries in the marvelous path of the infinite," that "these scenes should follow each other and be linked together, not in the

¹ H. J. Hunt, *The Epic in Nineteenth Century France* (Oxford, 1941), p. 2

shadows of the medieval hell, purgatory, or paradise, but in unlimited space"; when he adds that the poet's mission is to "release the real side of humanity from the mystic veils of the Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost, and the sacred books of Christianity,"² he is already defining to a considerable extent the conception of epic poetry which underlies the *Légende des siècles*. Quinet's conception, says Mr Hunt, is "humanitarian in its essence and trend," and his peculiar contribution to the evolution of the nineteenth-century epic is to offer "an alternative to the more exclusively Christian inspiration of Chateaubriand and Ballanche." In short, Quinet "contributes to the secularization of the humanitarian epic."³

Éloa and the *Poèmes antiques et modernes* of Alfred de Vigny also helped prepare the way for the *Légende des siècles*. The former with its admirable picture of Satan was described in 1824 by Victor Hugo as one of those "beautiful poems which sweep a name along with them . . . conceived with as much elevation as depth." The latter contains what may be called epic fragments, among which "Le Cor" is probably the most influential. Perhaps as lyric as it is epic, this poem nonetheless stirringly evokes in eighty odd lines the stand of Roland at Roncevaux. Vigny had other projects—a *Satan sauvé*, for example—which he failed to carry out. He lacked, as Mr. Hunt shrewdly says, "that self-conceit, that sublime confidence in their own capacity" which other French poets of the nineteenth century possessed.

If Vigny helped prepare the way with his epic fragments, Lamartine performed a similar service by different means. His long, almost interminable compositions, *Jocelyn* and *La Chute d'un ange*, are to some extent examples of the humanitarian epic which the early nineteenth century envisaged. Indeed, some critics give the palm in this domain to Lamartine rather than to Hugo. M. Fernand Greggh, ordinarily a fervent ad-

² Edgar Quinet, *De l'origine des dieux* (1828).

³ H. J. Hunt, *op. cit.*

mirer of Victor Hugo, calls *Jocelyn* "our only modern epic in French." Admirable as certain sections of Lamartine's poem are, that judgment seems quite exaggerated, for the poem contains far more lyrical than epic beauties even though one's criterion is no longer Homeric or Miltonian. *Jocelyn* may still be called an epic because of its narrative elements and its length and because of the atmosphere of moral grandeur which the poet so successfully creates. *La Chute d'un ange*, with its combination of barbaric episodes, its rapid and lively narration, its religious and metaphysical conceptions, contains in contrast more epic than lyrical beauties. It was, however, a failure in its day, and posterity has not been much kinder to it. It remains, as Mr Hunt says, "a striking experiment" and "marks a decisive step on the way to the *Légende des siècles*."

For Victor Hugo combines the epic fragment as developed by Vigny (which he had already used in the first sections of "L'Expiation") with the long philosophical poem, humanitarian in its essence. The subtitle, *Petites épopées*, reveals his debt to Vigny. The title itself *La Légende des siècles*, discloses his obligation to Quinet and Lamartine. Other influences, of course, exist. They have been dealt with exhaustively by M Berret and Mr Hunt. We need not catalogue them here.

The preface to the work marks the double aim pursued by the poet. It is, first, to give the reader "successive imprints of the human profile, from date to date, from Eve, mother of men, to the Revolution, mother of peoples." But Hugo wishes also to insist on Progress. His second aim, therefore, is to disclose the

expansion of the human race from century to century, man mounting from darkness to the ideal, the paradisiac transformation of the earthly hell, the slow and supreme birth of liberty, with rights for this life and responsibility for the next, a kind of religious hymn with a thousand stanzas enclosing a deep faith and manifesting a lofty prayer, the drama of creation lighted up by the visage of the creator,

that is what this poem will be when terminated, if God, the master of human existences, consents.

The first aim is obviously historical and artistic; one feels there the influence of Vigny. The other is philosophical. Here Hugo introduces his own special system—already expressed in “Ibo,” “Les Mages,” and “Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre.”

It was only the first series of the *Légende des siècles* that Hugo offered to the public in 1859. Other series came from his pen and were published in 1877 and 1883. What is more, the *Légende* was inseparable in the poet’s mind from two other compositions, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, still incomplete, and which were destined to remain unpublished till after his death. Concerning their relation he says:

The author has sketched out in solitude a kind of long poem in which reverberates the unique problem of Being in its triple aspect: Humanity, Evil, the Infinite, the progressive, the relative, the absolute, in what one might call three cantos: *La Légende des siècles*, *la Fin de Satan*, *Dieu*.

In this ambitious project, with its special philosophical purpose and interpretation, one feels the influence of Quinet and Lamartine.

Hugo’s historical aim is never literally realized. As history, the *Légende des siècles* is an absurdly sketchy affair. There is little on Rome and nothing on Greece. England and America, as well as the France of Louis XIV are conspicuously absent. The eighteenth century, including even the Revolution which Hugo had announced as an important subject, is blandly ignored. These lacunæ receive some attention in the later series, but are by no means completely filled. Furthermore, the periods which Hugo does treat are often handled with complete disregard for historical accuracy. The fact is that the work must be read not as history but as legend. The word *Légende* in the title is completely accurate. “The legendary aspect of things,” said Hugo, “prevails in these two volumes and

colors the poems." The first titles thought of, *La Légende humaine* and *La Légende de l'humanité*, which the poet discarded in favor of the more striking and original *Légende des siècles*, corresponded better to the contents of the book. Mankind through the ages is really the subject treated, and, if understandingly and properly read, successfully treated. For we must remember not only that this is poetry, but epic poetry, "as great as Homer and as naive as the *Bibliothèque bleue*" in Théophile Gautier's phrase. To apply to it the standards of a graduate course in history would be not only ridiculous but stupid. Baudelaire's opinion on this question is illuminating:

Then, wishing to create modern epic poetry, that is, poetry taking its origin or rather its pretext from history, he (Hugo) took care not to borrow anything but what it can legitimately and fruitfully lend to poetry. I mean legend, myth, fable, which are in some sense concentrations of national life, deep reservoirs where the blood and tears of peoples lie. In short he has not sung of one nation more particularly than another, or of the passion of one century at the expense of the rest, he has mounted at once to a philosophical summit whence the poet can contemplate all the evolutions of humanity with an equally curious, angry, or tender glance.

Clearly, in not being too historical, Hugo chose the best way to be successful.

The very first poem is certainly neither historically nor scientifically accurate, but is definitely legendary and symbolic. "Le Sacre de la femme" evokes the first man and the first woman, places them in a magnificent garden of Eden at the dawn of all existence (*Ineffable lever du premier rayon d'or*), celebrates feminine beauty and conjugal love, and proclaims the sacred majesty of conception. Only by implication is the poem anti-Catholic. There is no polemical or satirical note in this text which is quite simply an eloquent presentation of Hugo's own interpretation of the Biblical account. The serpent, the idea of temptation, the very notion of sin, are entirely absent. The poet is conscious of nothing but beauty:

Tout était flamme, hymen, bonheur, douceur, clémence,
Tant ces immenses jours avaient une aube immense!

These admirable lines will perhaps give some hint of the rest. Neither in the *De natura rerum* of Lucretius, nor in Louis Bouilhet's *Fossiles*, nor possibly even in Milton's *Paradise Lost* can one find a greater picture of primitive nature.

In Milton's text, Eve "with perfect beauty" is adorned. In Hugo's lines.

Ève offrait au ciel bleu la sainte nudité,
Ève blonde admirait l'aube, sa sœur vermeille

Chair de la femme! argile idéale! ô merveille!
O pénétration sublime de l'esprit
Dans le limon que l'Être ineffable pétrit!

And if Milton hails "wedded love, mysterious law, true source of human offspring," Hugo no less surrounds conjugal union with the perfection of poetic tribute.

Cependant la tendresse inexprimable et douce
De l'astre, du vallon, du lac, du brin de mousse,
Tressaillait plus profonde à chaque instant autour
D'Ève, que saluait du haut des cieux le jour,

Un long rayon d'amour lui venait des abîmes,
De l'ombre, de l'azur, des profondeurs, des cimes,
De la fleur, de l'oiseau chantant, du roc muet
Et, pâle, Ève sentit que son flanc remuait

The symbolic significance of this idyllic picture needs no elaboration. By its admirable union of descriptive and lyrical themes as well as by its central thought, "Le Sacre de la femme," is a fitting opening, a worthy *morceau d'ouverture*, in M. Berret's phrase, for the symphony of the *Legend of the Centuries*.

This *Légende des siècles* is, indeed, a varied and extensive composition in which Hugo includes all possible moods and

effects. The serenity of "Le Sacre de la femme" is also felt in "Booz endormi." The clash and clamor of medieval battle are heard in "Le Mariage de Roland." The fury of the tossing sea and the moral heroism of humble fishermen are the double theme of "Les Pauvres Gens." A vision of a mighty armada rushing to its doom is combined in "La Rose de l'Infante" with a charming picture of a little girl standing in a garden. Moral-bearing parables are presented excitingly as in "La Conscience," calmly and reflectively as in "Dieu invisible au philosophe." The invective and thunder of *Les Châtiments* are heard again in "Le Régiment du Baron Madruce." Pagan mythology, rearranged and brought up to date, peers from the lines of "Le Satyre," a poem charged with philosophical meaning. The voyage of a dirigible balloon into the blue empyrean is the inspiring subject of "Plein ciel" with its fulfillment of the prophecy of progress. But mere enumeration is inadequate to make us understand the beauty and genius of the work. Some detailed analysis is required.

Of the moral-bearing parables just mentioned "La Conscience," with its unforgettable picture of Cain, is the most famous. The headlong flight of this man, "disheveled, livid, in the midst of storms," before the wrath of Jehovah is suggested from almost the first line. It made Hugo think quite naturally of Napoleon III and he considered for a moment including the poem in *Les Châtiments*. But "La Conscience" is so much wider in its possible meaning and implication that he wisely decided it belonged to a different type of volume. For the poem contains, in addition to the sinister portrait of Cain, a tableau of primitive customs and manners. The children of Cain are clad in skins and sleep under tents of the same material. Above all the poem contains a symbolic picture of remorse. Hugo, in sixty-eight lines packed with local color, has composed a fast-moving drama of human conscience in which Cain, seeking to escape from the eye so inexorably fixed upon him, in vain tries flight and in vain attempts to hide behind ever

thicker walls. Even an underground refuge is inadequate.
L'œil était dans la tombe et regardait Cain.

In contrast to this somber drama is the gentle and beautiful idyl of "Booz endormi" inspired by the Book of Ruth which Hugo had long admired. Back in the days when the family lived at Les Feuillantines, according to a poem of *Les Contemplations*.

Nous lûmes tous les trois ainsi, tout le matin,
 Joseph, Ruth et Booz, le bon Samaritain
 Et toujours plus charmés, le soir nous le relûmes

The Biblical narrative centers the interest on Ruth and presents Boaz as a pious man who, as M. Berret says, "fulfills a duty of protection toward a distant relative." Hugo's poem transfers the main interest from Ruth to Boaz and idealizes the latter even more than does the Bible. It places the characters and the event related in a superbly beautiful setting, at once primitive, sensual, and august.

The poem opens with a picture of the venerable patriarch sleeping amidst his material possessions. *Booz dormait auprès des boisseaux pleins de blé*. But immediately the poet insists on his moral qualities. Boaz, "although rich, was inclined to justice," and he was, above all, charitable.

Quand il voyait passer quelque pauvre glaneuse
 "Laissez tomber expres des épis," disait-il

He trod, in short, the straight and narrow way clad in probity and candor (*Vêtu de probité candide et de lin blanc*). And this took place, says the poet quite simply, "in very ancient times," when

Les tribus d'Israel avaient pour chef un juge,
 La terre, où l'homme errait sous la tente, inquiet
 Des empreintes de pieds de géants qu'il voyait,
 Était mouillée encor et molle du déluge

Boaz, asleep, dreams, and his dream is one of the poet's successful inventions. For Hugo attributes to him a vision of a

tree, a great oak leading from the patriarch to David and ultimately to Christ — "Un roi chantait en bas, en haut mourait un dieu." Hugo has obviously adapted to his own purposes the medieval tree of Jesse as well as the Biblical dream of Jacob, but, since the Bible indicates that the son of Boaz and Ruth was in fact the ancestor of David, this section of the poem gives to the union its predestined significance.

That union is simply and beautifully suggested in the last stanzas which finally introduce Ruth, the Moabite. Hugo insists above all on the setting which is majestic in its oriental splendor.

Un frais parfum sortait des touffes d'asphodèle,
Les souffles de la nuit flottaient sur Galgala

L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle,
Les anges y volaient sans doute obscurément,
Car on voyait passer dans la nuit, par moment,
Quelque chose de bleu qui paraissait une aile

These last four lines, written in the margin of the manuscript, indicate to what extent Hugo wished to insist on the alliance with nature. "Une immense bonté tombait du firmament," he says a little farther on, and he closes the poem with a magnificent stanza in which Ruth, asleep in the moonlight, wonders

Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles

The metaphor came, as scholars have pointed out, from Louis Bouilhet's *Bucolique*, but, transformed under Hugo's more talented pen, it widens the horizon of this nocturnal vision.

Should the question arise as to what all this has to do with epic poetry, the answer must be that "Booz endormi" is one of the *empreintes successives* which Hugo's preface announced as the subject of the collection. Boaz may not be a soldier, a man of action, or a great religious leader, he is certainly not

a great rebel, but the poem in which he figures gives us a view of the best in the civilization of the Hebrews, and it relates a moment in their history which is a prelude, though a distant one, to the advent of Christianity

If "Booz endormi" marks this transition, Christianity itself is seen through the poem, "Première rencontre du Christ avec le tombeau" Hugo's aim in *La Légende des siècles* could not have been completely realized without at least a glimpse of the man who so extraordinarily reshaped the Western World. Christ is, therefore, the central figure in a poem the title of which suggests the ultimate tragedy of the crucifixion. The episode related is the raising of Lazarus, an event which kindled Hugo's imagination, for his work contains frequent allusions to it

With infinite respect Hugo closely follows the Biblical text. His language has that direct simplicity which he knew so well how to adopt when he chose. In fact, in spite of the heresy of his own religious ideas, Hugo always treated the person and character of Jesus with reverence, even to the extent, as in this poem, of accepting some of his miracles as authentic. Here, of course, the explanation is clear. He is leading up to a condemnation of the priests of Jesus' day — and, by implication, of all priests.

Or, les prêtres, selon qu'au livre il est écrit,
S'assemblèrent, troublés, chez le préteur de Rome,
Sachant que Christ avait ressuscité cet homme,
Et que tous avaient vu le sépulcre s'ouvrir,
Ils dirent "Il est temps de le faire mourir"

Composed in October 1852, Hugo thought of including this poem, like "La Conscience," in *Les Châtiments*. His intention was to entitle it "Les Prêtres" and make it by inference applicable to the churchmen who accepted the *coup d'État*. But the satirical element of the poem is minor in contrast to the symbolic value of the event related. Hugo wisely decided to reserve it for the volume he already had more or less in mind.

That clash and clamor of medieval battle heard in "Le Mariage de Roland" of which we spoke in an earlier paragraph constitutes a kind of opening phase to an extensive treatment of the Middle Ages which obviously fascinated Victor Hugo's mature years as much as they had his more Romantic youth. "Le Mariage de Roland" and "Aymerillot" were composed in 1846, long before the poet's political conflicts had occurred and before he had elaborated the details of his religious philosophy. They are, therefore, among the most objective poems of the *Légende des siècles*. What is more, they are considered by most critics as models of the little epic. Heroic in tone and temper, narrative in content, dramatic in presentation, with a compact, arresting dénouement, they give the modern reader in concentrated form something of the emotional reaction which early readers of Homer or the *Song of Roland* experienced. When, in "Le Mariage de Roland," the hero fights with Oliver, Hugo comments:

Le voyageur s'effraye et croit voir dans la brume
D'étranges bûcherons qui travaillent la nuit

Even such a hostile critic as Mr Giese admits that this touch is "truly Homeric," just as he is forced to admire the genuine heroism of Aymerillot's couplet.

Deux hards couvriraient fort bien toutes mes terres
Mais tout le grand ciel bleu n'emplirait pas mon cœur

And he, like all other critics, would doubtless praise the line:

Et les os des héros blanchissent dans les plaines

one of those admirably resonant alexandrines in which Victor Hugo encloses a picture as well as a sentiment ⁴

⁴ Mr Giese maintains that, except for these and a few other successful bits, Hugo has failed, that he seems "to have transplanted from the serious medieval epic only its barbaric tone and its crude exaggerations." M. Berret, M. Rigal, and quite recently, M. Levaillant and Mr Hunt, are in my opinion more reliable critics. M. Berret, unrestrained in his praise, ends his analysis of the two poems with the following judgment: "Tout ce qui émane, trop souvent épars, d'esprit

These two poems were drawn not directly from the old *chansons de geste* but from an article by Achille Jubinal on *Quelques romans chez nos aïeux* which gave a prose résumé of three medieval epics: *Girard de Viane*, *Aymeri de Narbonne*, and *Raoul de Cambrai*. One has only to compare this prose with Hugo's verse, as M. Berret has already done, to see the difference between mere competence and poetic genius. For Hugo has admirably dramatized the episodes, at the same time bringing out and enriching all their picturesque qualities. For example, at the very beginning (as M. Berret says) Hugo improves on his source. Jubinal merely says:

Il fut donc décidé qu'un combat particulier entre Olivier et Roland aurait lieu le matin dans une île située au-dessous de Vienne, au milieu du Rhône

But Victor Hugo writes:

Ils se battent — combat terrible! — corps à corps
Voilà déjà longtemps que leurs chevaux sont morts,
Ils sont là tous deux dans une île du Rhône

The identity of the warriors is not revealed at once. That comes only after a skillful "build-up" twenty lines farther on:

Car de ces deux enfants, qu'on regarde en tremblant,
L'un s'appelle Olivier et l'autre a nom Roland

héroïque et aventureux, de grandeur guerrière, de puissance dramatique, de noblesse poétique et de pittoresque dans nos chansons de geste, est là, agrandi et condensé, il semble qu'on entende frémir dans le 'Mariage de Roland' et dans 'Aymerillot' toute l'âme épique du moyen âge." M. Rigal, while admitting that Hugo is somewhat less devoted to measure than was Homer and is also less delicate in his portrayals of character, declares emphatically "C'est un Homère qui a quelque chose de la raideur et de la psychologie rudimentaire de nos vieux épiques français." M. Levaillant calls Hugo's "Aymerillot" "un vrai chant d'épopée" and adds that a natural instinct led the poet "à retrouver, dès 1846, les sentiments et le ton des personnages de la Chanson de Roland, qui ne fut éditée qu'en 1850." And Mr. Hunt, whose literary taste is of the same high quality as his erudition, places the "Mariage de Roland" and "Aymerillot" among a "dozen or so grand tales so colourfully and effectively told" for which the *Légende des siècles* will above all live

Concerning the arming of the two fighters, Jubinal is brief:

L'auteur entre alors dans de grands détails sur la manière dont on arma Olivier. Un vieux juif apporta des armes qui avaient appartenu à Salomon. L'archevêque de Vienne les bénit, puis les ayant remises au jeune héros celui-ci monta dans une barque qui devait les conduire au lieu du combat. De son côté Roland ne fut pas en retard et Durandal à la main, il gagne le lieu du rendez-vous

From these meager details Hugo, with the aid of his marvelous imagination, built an extraordinarily effective passage. For the arming of Oliver he used what little there was in Jubinal, and created the rest, making it as colorful as possible. But his real stroke of genius came in making a sharp antithesis between the arming of Oliver and the arms of Roland, whereas twelve lines were necessary for the former, one alone suffices for Charlemagne's nephew:

Roland a son habit de fer, et Durandal

Jubinal does better in his account of the long battle which he reports as lasting two days, and which Hugo, prompted by Roland's boast that he can fight four days and nights, expands at once into a four-day conflict, but his narrative is far from having the color and drama of Hugo's "Four days have passed," writes the latter, and

l'île et le rivage

Tremblent sous ce fracas monstrueux et sauvage
Ils vont, viennent, jamais fuyant, jamais lassés,
Froissent le glaive au glaive et sautent les fossés,
Et passent, au milieu des ronces remuées,
Comme deux tourbillons et comme deux nuées
O chocs affreux! terreur! tumulte étincelant!

The struggle, in Jubinal's account, is brought to a close by the intervention of an angel. In spite of Hugo's fondness for the miraculous (le merveilleux) and in spite of its definitely medieval quality, he rejected this detail in favor of a purely human solution. He makes the epic grandeur of the two war-

riors derive exclusively, as M. Berret puts it, "from the chivalrous nobility of their souls." In Jubinal's account, furthermore, the proposal that Roland marry the sister of Oliver is but a pleasant afterthought. In Hugo's it constitutes the very essence of the dénouement and permits the poet to end his text with one of those admirably compact and striking lines which he liked so well: "C'est ainsi que Roland épousa la belle Aude."

The Middle Ages also gave Hugo the Scandinavian tale of horror, "Le Parricide," the portrait of Spain's national hero in "Bivar," "Le Jour des rois" in which not only the Spanish landscape is reflected but also the poet's hostility to feudal tyrants, and those two splendid tales, "Le Petit Roi de Galice" and "Éviradnus." Of all these, "Le Parricide" is perhaps the most admired, though the choice is difficult. Some prefer "Éviradnus," but in spite of its incontestable beauties — which include a charming lyric. "Si tu veux, faisons un rêve" — it borders rather too openly on melodrama.

"Le Parricide" has obvious affiliations with "La Conscience." Both deal with the divine punishment of a criminal. Both might have appeared in *Les Châtiments* where Napoleon III was in fact labeled "Cain" and "parricide," condemned to be the "assassin who roams over the plains," with the "blood from the guillotine falling on him drop by drop."⁵ In "Le Parricide" King Kanut, guilty of his father's death, is condemned to roam through all eternity clad in a blood-soaked shroud and barred from Valhalla. There is genuine epic grandeur both in the king's panic-stricken flight as the drops of blood spot ever more completely his snowy mantle and in the vision of his ultimate fate.

Une goutte de sang tomba sur lui Farouche,
La prière effrayée expirant dans sa bouche,
Il se remit en marche, et, lugubre, hésitant,
Hideux, ce spectre blanc passait, et, par instant,
Une goutte de sang se détachait de l'ombre,
Implacable, et tombait sur cette blancheur sombre

⁵ See the poem "Sacer esto."

He is another Cain, subjected to a more dreadful punishment, which reaches its climax in the last lines of the poem:

Le linceul était rouge et Kanut frissonna.

Et c'est pourquoi Kanut, fuyant devant l'aurore
Et reculant, n'a pas osé paraître encore
Devant le juge au front duquel le soleil luit,
C'est pourquoi ce roi sombre est resté dans la nuit,
Et, sans pouvoir rentrer dans sa blancheur première,
Sentant, à chaque pas qu'il fait vers la lumière,
Une goutte de sang sur sa tête pleuvoir,
Rôde éternellement sous l'énorme ciel noir

The sonorous syllables with their organ-like resonance contribute impressively to the terrible beauty of the vision

The oriental tyrannies which appear in the *Légende des siècles* are disappointing. The first, devoted to Zim-Zizimi, Sultan of Egypt, is a visionary narrative in which this despot, depicted as being not only sensual and cruel but totally indifferent to the "austere book and divine text" of his priests, quails before the thought of vanished glory and inevitable death. We are ill-prepared to see this man, who reminds us of Baudelaire's famous line *il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka*, tremble as symbolic night enters his palace and taking him by the hand says, simply, "Come." Nor is the picture of the second tyrant, Sultan Murad, more convincing. This ruler, as cruel as his predecessor, has an even stranger moment of weakness and pity when he succors a dying pig. For this little act of mercy his great crimes are forgiven. All this is quite incredible, and Hugo has certainly been guilty here of the grossest exaggeration. What a pity he did not stick to the picturesque or historical aspects of the Orient! The author of *Les Orientales* could have rendered their barbaric splendor so admirably

He completely redeems himself in a poem like "La Rose de l'Infante," one of the artistic gems of the collection. The historical event inspiring it, and which had long fired Hugo's imagination, was the dispersal and destruction in 1588 of the

great Spanish Armada by the elements and the British navy. Hugo concentrates on the storm which providentially gave the English time to gather and dispose their forces. In 1842 he had already mentioned the subject in the conclusion to *Le Rhin*. "This monstrous armament would have annihilated England. A gust of wind swept it away. This gust of wind which blew in the night of September 2, 1588 changed the face of the world." Such a great historical moment was supremely appropriate for the *Légende des siècles*. But not, decided the poet, in a military or naval poem. Remembering perhaps a Velasquez painting in which the Infanta Margarita-Maria-Teresa⁶ is represented holding a rose in her hand, Hugo by a stroke of genius suggests the mighty storm so devastating to the Armada by describing an unexpected gust which in the royal garden of Aranjuez stripped the petals from the Infanta's rose. The little girl, herself, is gracefully portrayed

Elle est toute petite, une duègne la garde
Elle tient à la main une rose et regarde

La rose épanouie et toute grande ouverte,
Sortant du frais bouton comme d'une urne verte,
Charge la petitesse exquise de sa main,
Quand l'enfant, allongeant ses lèvres de carmin,
Fronce, en la respirant, sa riante narine,
La magnifique fleur, royale et purpurine
Cache plus qu'à demi ce visage charmant,
Si bien que l'œil hésite, et qu'on ne sait comment
Distinguer de la fleur ce bel enfant qui joue,
Et si l'on voit la rose ou si l'on voit la joue

The child's father, meanwhile, paces behind the windows of the castle. This somber and sinister figure, one of those creatures who periodically appear to threaten the peace and security of the world, does not behold the graceful picture in the

⁶ Velasquez painted the daughter of Philip IV, Hugo, of course, is talking of Philip II and his child

garden below him. Instead, there is mirrored in his eyes the vision of a fleet at sea.

Si quelqu'un pouvait voir dans l'œil de ce fantôme

Ce qu'on distinguerait, c'est, mirage mouvant,
Tout un vol de vaisseaux en fuite dans le vent,
Et dans l'écume, au pli des vagues, sous l'étoile,
L'immense tremblement d'une flotte à la voile,
Et, là-bas, sous la brume, une île, un blanc rocher,
Écoutant sur les flots ces tonnerres marcher

The vision brings an unwonted smile to the king's lips, for

Cette pâle Angleterre, il la tient donc enfin!
Qui pourrait la sauver?

All this time his daughter has been standing by a pool in the garden, gravely holding her rose Suddenly,

un souffle d'air, une de ces haleines
Que le soir frémissant jette à travers les plaines,
L' tumultueux zéphyr effleurant l'horizon,
Trouble l'eau, fait frémir les joncs, met un frisson
Dans les lointains massifs de myrte et d'asphodèle,
Vient jusqu'au bel enfant tranquille, et, d'un coup d'aile,
Rapide, et secouant même l'arbre voisin
Effeuille brusquement la fleur dans le bassin.

The water is strangely disturbed and the petals are scattered, whirling, in all directions "On croit voir," says the poet, "dans un gouffre une flotte qui sombre"

The conclusion to this series of pictures with their mighty drama in miniature is expressed by the Infanta's duenna

— Madame, dit la duègne avec sa face d'ombre
A la petite fille étonnée et rêvant.
Tout sur terre appartient aux princes, hors le vent

Neither God nor Nature — pretty much identical in Hugo's philosophy, as we have seen — permits tyrants to rule the elements

Equally fine pictures, though suggested by a far different subject, are to be found in "Les Pauvres Gens." Victor Hugo, like Lamartine, believed the courage of the humble to be worthy of epic treatment. In "Les Pauvres Gens" he depicted a twofold heroism: that of the sailor in his conflict with the sea — the theme of "Oceano Nox" on a grander scale — and the moral courage of a man and his wife who take upon themselves new burdens of labor and sacrifice by adopting the children of a dead neighbor. The subject was suggested to Hugo either by a poem, "Les Enfants de la morte," written by one Charles Lafont, or, as is more likely, by an anonymous prose account of the same episode, published in the *Indépendant de la Moselle* and reproduced on September 10, 1852 in *La Presse*. This newspaper, it will be remembered, was published by Hugo's friend, Émile de Girardin, and Hugo received it regularly. In any event, Hugo has once again transformed by his genius material wholly lacking in literary distinction.

The skill with which the poet amalgamates different themes is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the poem. The poverty of these people, the anxiety of the waiting wife, and the struggle of her husband with the sea are expressed in the following lines:

Elle songe, elle rêve — Et tant de pauvreté!

— O Dieu! le vent rugit comme un soufflet de forge,
La côte fait le bruit d'une enclume, on croit voir
Les constellations fuir dans l'ouragan noir
Comme les tourbillons d'étincelles de l'âtre
C'est l'heure où, gai danseur, minuit rit et folâtre
Sous le loup de satin qu'illuminent ses yeux,
Et c'est l'heure où minuit, brigand mystérieux,
Voilé d'ombre et de pluie et le front dans la bise,
Prend un pauvre marin frissonnant, et le brise
Aux rochers monstrueux apparus brusquement —
Horreur! l'homme dont l'onde éteint le hurlement,
Sent fondre et s'enfoncer le bâtiment qui plonge,

Il sent s'ouvrir sous lui l'ombre et l'abîme, et songe
Au vieil anneau de fer du quai plein de soleil!
Ces mornes visions troublent son cœur, pareil
A la nuit Elle tremble et pleure

Such passages with their combination of graceful metaphors (the gay masked dancer representing midnight) and serene visions (the iron ring of the sunlit wharf) on the one hand, and grim reality on the other are the measure of Hugo's originality and poetic talent. Later in the poem the corpse of the dead neighbor, her children smiling in their sleep in the same cradle, and the beating of the tempest on the leaky roof above them are evoked with the same masterly skill. "Les Pauvres Gens" has consequently been judged by Hugo's bitterest American critic to be one of his "greatest poetical successes."⁷

All these descriptive and narrative poems contain hints of Hugo's philosophy. "Les Pauvres Gens," for example, reveals his deeply rooted humanitarianism. But Hugo properly felt that more complete and specific statements of his philosophical views were desirable. They are to be found in "Le Satyre," the central poem of the whole collection, and in the two poems of *Vingtième siècle* which give us the fulfillment of the poet's prophecies.

"Le Satyre," with its classical title, is placed in the section devoted to the Renaissance. It seems an odd location. But Hugo's reasons are simple: during the sixteenth century classical antiquity again became well known in western Europe, and during that age of discovery and exploration the human mind was freed by the Humanists from many shackling limitations. For these reasons, while the essential thought of the poem, the belief in Progress, belongs to the modern era and particularly to the nineteenth century, its classical framework does not seem incongruous.

The poem, one of Hugo's most extraordinary creations, is divided into a Prologue (which paints the portrait of the

⁷ Giese, *op. cit.*

lascivious "hairy thinker, made of mud and azure") and four parts. *Le Bleu*, *Le Noir*, *Le Sombre*, and *L'Étoilé* *Le Bleu* describes the assembly of the gods on Olympus; the Satyr is brought before them by Hercules, is ridiculed by them, and finally ordered to sing to them. The next two parts are devoted to the Satyr's song. In *Le Noir* he sings of the "monstrous earth" depicted here in all its primitive force and exuberance. "Nowhere," as Mr Hunt says, "nowhere more powerfully than in these pages has Hugo translated into poetry his conviction of omniscience in a Nature which enjoys the awful privilege of contemplating the Cause and the 'sainte Énigme' face to face"⁸ Ultimately man, emerging from this earth, appears. This expression of evolution was printed several months before Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, and consequently owed nothing to it. Hugo's own philosophy, based on progress, led him to the conception

In *Le Sombre*, the Satyr, borrowing the lyre of Phoebus, sings of man. The gods are now taking him seriously, and they listen breathlessly to his song. Man, the "chiffre élu," the "tête auguste du nombre," is the fascinating subject, man with his early debasement, his ignorance, his slavery, his cruelty, followed by his slow but inevitable rise. For plagues and wars are followed by victories over nature, by the conquest of matter. Outclassing the minor poets, like Maxime Du Camp, Amédée Pommier, and François Barrillot, who a few years before had been writing of such things, Hugo evokes the locomotive, the steamboat, and the balloon in picturesque and magnificent lines. This material progress is but a symbol of the majesty of man whose destiny is to free himself from all yokes. And the Satyr, now addressing man rather than the gods, exclaims:

Transfigure-toi! va! sois de plus en plus l'âme!
 Esclave, grain d'un roi, démon, larve d'un dieu,
 Prends le rayon, saisis l'aube, usurpe le feu,

⁸ H. J. Hunt, *op cit*, p. 293

Torse ailé, front divin, monte au jour, monte au trône,
Et dans la sombre nuit jette les pieds du faune!

Before his now uneasy audience — even Jupiter is dumfounded — the Satyr comes to his conclusion. He predicts the defeat of the gods and the achievement of liberty. His own metamorphosis is accelerated until he seems to be the universe itself: *L'espace immense entra dans cette forme noire*. In a final outburst he proclaims the triumph of the spirit

Place à l'atome saint, qui brûle ou qui ruisselle!
Place au rayonnement de l'âme universelle!

Place à Tout! je suis Pan, Jupiter! à genoux

But he is not the god Pan of the ancients, he is a Hugolian Pan in whom vibrates the "universal soul" of the poet's belief.

The general meaning and import of "Le Satyre" for anyone who has read attentively the poems of *Au bord de l'infini* in *Les Contemplations* is clear. The poem sums up Victor Hugo's philosophical doctrines. For the Satyr symbolizes the double nature of man. He symbolizes the dignity and grandeur of the human spirit and human intelligence placed in opposition to the gods of Olympus. He symbolizes the gradual triumph of azure over mud, of spirit over matter. His metamorphosis is ultimately identical with that inevitable progress of man and the universe, with that certain victory of goodness over evil which Hugo had already predicted in "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre." "Le Satyre" is, therefore, from the philosophical point of view, the most important poem of the *Légende des siècles*.

Its theoretical statement of the progress of man is brought to concrete realization in the two poems, "Pleine mer" and "Plein ciel," which make up *Vingtième siècle*. Nowhere does Hugo more reveal himself as a man of his time, for if the complex and contradictory nineteenth century believed in anything it was that the twentieth would see the achievement of the

good society and the good life by means of democracy and science. Hugo's faith in democracy was expressed elsewhere. These two poems express his faith in science.

They do so by a very odd antithesis which requires explanation. "Pleine mer" represents the past with its ignorance and barbarity, the image used being the steamship. "Plein ciel" through the airship symbolizes the future with its achievement of liberty and goodness. But how is one to account for the choice of the steamship as a symbol of darkness? Most of the nineteenth century, including Hugo himself, saw in the steamship the symbol of progress. Why should Hugo in 1858 view it otherwise? Until Professor George Gifford solved the mystery, no satisfactory answer was forthcoming. M. Berret, to be sure, had shown that Hugo had in mind the *Great Eastern*, a huge ship for its time, originally dubbed the *Leviathan*. It remained for Mr. Gifford to prove that the *Great Eastern*, though destined for commerce, was also considered by the English as a potential warship. Now war, in Hugo's eyes, was an evil which would one day be abolished, presumably in the twentieth century. Here, then, is the reason why the steamship is for once a symbol of the barbarous past. The original name of the ship, recalling the Biblical monster of evil connotation, also contributed to this interpretation.

Léviathan, c'est là tout le vieux monde,
Apre et démesuré dans sa fauve laideur,
Léviathan, c'est là tout le passé. grandeur,
Horreur

In this "old world," including the nineteenth century (for Hugo was writing from the point of view of the twentieth) men devoured each other in warfare and

Ce sinistre vaisseau les aidait dans leur œuvre

Yet the poet cannot suppress a kind of involuntary and shuddering admiration:

Dans l'ancre d'où sortait son vaste mouvement,
 Au fond d'une fournaise on voyait vaguement
 Des êtres ténébreux marcher dans des nuées
 D'étincelles, parmi les braises remuées,
 Et pour âme il avait dans sa cale un enfer

A kind of Dantesque vision in which Hugo once again reveals his great talent as a painter of infernal scenes

The ethereal, too, can inspire beautiful lines as "Plein ciel" amply proves. Here again, actuality underlies the text, for contemporary experiments with the dirigible balloon, particularly those of Pétin in 1850 and 1851, had deeply interested literary men as well as scientists. Théophile Gautier had described Pétin's balloon in *La Presse*. François Barrillot had written a poem about it. In 1859 Hugo, doubtless remembering these events and recalling Lamartine's vision of aerial navigation in *La Chute d'un ange*, composed "Plein ciel."

Victor Hugo evokes the airship with poetic enthusiasm:

Loin dans les profondeurs, hors des nuits, hors du flot,
 Dans un écartement de nuages, qui laisse
 Voir au-dessus des mers la céleste allégresse,
 Un point vague et confus apparaît, dans le vent,
 Dans l'espace, ce point se meut, il est vivant,
 Il va, descend, remonte, il fait ce qu'il veut faire,
 Il approche, il prend forme, il vient, c'est une sphère,
 C'est un inexprimable et surprenant vaisseau,
 Globe comme le monde et comme l'aigle oiseau,
 C'est un navire en marche. Où? Dans l'éther sublime!

Qu'est-ce que ce navire impossible? C'est l'homme

After paying tribute to human audacity and genius, Hugo lingers on the description of the ship, and, above all, on its flight.

Calme, il monte où jamais nuage n'est monté,
 Il plane à la hauteur de la sérénité,
 Devant la vision des sphères . . .

These beautiful lines and others immediately following are a prelude to the poet's concluding interpretation.

Où va-t-il, ce navire? Il va, de jour vêtu,
 A l'avenir divin et pur, à la vertu,
 A la science qu'on voit luire,
 A la mort des fléaux, à l'oubli généreux,
 Il va, ce glorieux navire,

 Au droit, à la raison, à la fraternité
 A la religieuse et sainte vérité
 Sans imposture et sans voiles

The progress forecast in "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" and in "Le Satyre" finds a supreme realization in this flight of the dirigible. For this is more than mere mechanical progress; it is representative of the advance of the human spirit. Today, when the airplane is as much an instrument of destruction as of mercy and constructive good, Hugo's idealism seems terribly naive. But the faith behind that idealism is a faith we need to revive and to guard if the achievements of science are ever to be turned to a consistently good purpose and if the scourge of war is ever to be lifted from the human race.

Surprisingly, the vision of hope enclosed in the lines of "Plein ciel" is not the last word of the 1859 *Légende des siècles*. The final poem, "La Trompette du jugement," returning to the Bible for its general inspiration, gives us an apocalyptic vision at once terrible and grandiose. But instead of the Judgment-Scene which the title leads the reader to expect, the poet imagines a trumpet "hovering in space amid a silence more dreadful than the peal it is waiting to emit."⁹ A mysterious hand reaches out to seize it:

Vers la trompette, effroi de tout crime impuni,
 Qui doit faire à la mort un jour lever la tête,
 Elle [the hand] pendait énorme, ouverte, et comme prête
 A saisir ce clairon qui se tait dans la nuit,
 Et qu'emplit le sommeil formidable du bruit

⁹ H. J. Hunt, *op cit*, p. 296

La main, dans la nuée et hors de l'Invisible
S'allongeait.

Humanity marches uneasily on beneath the threat of the trumpet-blast, the poet seems to say. This grim reminder corrects whatever over-optimism may have slipped into *Vingtième siècle*. All is not yet faced, not yet revealed.

The trumpet's silence is not only a reminder of the hazard and the promise of our life, but also, quite possibly, a suggestion of further revelations to be made by the poet himself. The way is left open for the Biblical and apocalyptic visions of the second and third series. Coming, as they did, so many years later, and composed at great intervals, the closeness of the connection with the volumes of 1859 has been weakened. The first series (with a few exceptions) was written in the incredibly short time of two years, from 1857 to 1859. Some of the poems of the second series go back to this same period, others were penned in 1873 and 1874. The second and third series contain, of course, some deservedly famous texts: genuine little epics like "Le Cimetière d'Eylau" and "L'Aigle du casque", a fabulous but strangely effective narrative such as "Les Trois Cents", a touching episode of the Commune in "Guerre civile"; visions of astronomical grandeur as in "La Comète"; satirical masterpieces like "L'Élégie des fléaux," "Les Quatre Jours d'Elciis," and "La Vision de Dante", a Baudelairean tableau of death as in "L'Épopée du ver". The second series has a certain unity in that it carries on the development of the poet's social pity and moral ideas. Yet even when we acknowledge these achievements, the poems of 1877 and 1883 add relatively little to the thought and the artistry of the earlier volumes.

The fact is that the original *Légende des siècles* quite definitely established Hugo's reputation as a great epic poet. For that collection — always excepting "Sultan Mourad" and "Le Crapaud" — contained beauties of the first order. The admirable nocturne of "Booz endormi," the white and red horror of "Le Parricide," the thrilling heroism of "Aymerillot," the

eloquent gesture of destiny in "La Rose de l'Infante," the confident song of the Satyr, the poetic thunder of "Ratbert," the beauty of the stormy sea and the moral courage of humble people in "Les Pauvres Gens," the majestic vision of the airship in "Plein ciel" are unforgettable pieces of literature for any sensitive, sympathetic, and fair-minded reader. They deserve this praise not only because of their central themes and general artistic beauty, but also because of the manifold details which charm or exalt. We have called attention to some of them during the present chapter. the marvelously evocative line, *Et les os des héros blanchissent dans les plaines* of "Aymerillot," for instance, or the vision of peaceful life and security called up by the *vieil anneau de fer du quai plein de soleil* in "Les Pauvres Gens." There are many others. By virtue of the intensity of its colors, the plastic quality of its pictures, the supple firmness of its rhythm, the variety and richness of its imagery the *Légende des siècles* stands as a magnificent production. It remains a monument of Hugo's mature genius and of the supremacy of his art.

CHAPTER XII

"LA FIN DE SATAN" AND "DIEU"

Je suis plus sûr de l'existence de
Dieu que de la mienne propre
— V. H.

THE two remaining poems of that trilogy conceived by Victor Hugo during the first part of his residence on Guernsey were not published till after his death. But *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu* are so intimately connected with the poet's thought from 1854 to 1859 that it would be an error to postpone their analysis

I

The fascinating figure of Satan cast a magic spell on more than one type of intellect. The Christian was both repelled and attracted, for although the Prince of Darkness might be, in Milton's phrase, an "infernal Serpent," he had undeniable charm. Some of that "original brightness" with which he was clothed in "the happy realms of Light" still clung to him and could dazzle the wariest. The Romantic, on the other hand, undisturbed by inner conflict, found in Satan a kindred spirit. Were they not both rebels? Were they not both defiers of authority and tradition? Were they not, therefore, natural allies in a kind of common struggle against bourgeois "stiffness" and morality? Then, for the Romantic as well as for the Christian, there was always the possibility of redemption. Paradise lost can be regained — by either Adam or Lucifer. A damned soul can be saved. For the Christian, salvation must be achieved by orthodox means, for the Romantic, the rehabilitation of Satan or any sinner was possible through the force of love alone. The difference between a fallen Marion de Lorme and

a fallen Lucifer was perhaps, in Victor Hugo's eyes, only a difference of degree.

The subject had tempted Hugo for some time, although it is difficult to assign any precise date to its conception. As a child he had read of Satan (as well as of Ruth and the good Samaritan) in the Bible Chateaubriand had probably revealed Milton's poem to him Alfred de Vigny's *Éloa* (1824) he had reviewed in the pages of the *Conservateur littéraire* Lamartine's *Chute d'un ange* (1839) and Soumet's *Divine Épopée* (1840), so different from each other in treatment and in talent, doubtless helped to stimulate his interest. But his life was active and full Not till the exile, not till he had completed *Les Châtiments* and some of *Les Contemplations* did he think in any precise terms of a poem dealing with the great rebel In 1856 he announced the forthcoming publication of *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* Evidently he had been at work on the project But he had counted without his publisher, who besought him not to give his readers anything so abstract so soon after the *Contemplations*, but rather to complete the *Petites épopées* which would surely be successful It was good advice and Hugo took it Three years later he published the *Légende des siècles* and once again announced that *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* would be forthcoming He worked on the latter for a while in 1860 and then stopped Twenty odd years were to pass before *La Fin de Satan* finally found its way, still incomplete, into print.

The subject offered, of course, one great difficulty This Hebraic-Christian myth (or doctrine) is an important part of orthodox Christian theology As such, it was inevitably in conflict with Hugo's philosophy of progress and his belief in metempsychosis elaborated in "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" and in *La Légende des siècles* But if any man ever believed that consistency is the virtue of small minds, it was certainly Victor Hugo. A contradiction rarely embarrassed him. We shall see with what ease he solved this particular dilemma.

The poem opens with a dramatic description of Satan's fall. This was the kind of thing that Hugo was so well qualified to write. The flight of Cain in "La Conscience" had given an inkling of what the reader might expect of Hugo when confronted by a somewhat similar but infinitely vaster subject. He excelled, as José-Maria de Heredia said, in making the immaterial palpable and visible, and, as we have seen more than once, he excelled in depicting the grandiose and the infinite. Satan's fall is no commonplace affair *Depuis quatre mille ans il tombait dans l'abîme* Then immediately, this "frightening creature whose name is *Never*" is made admirably material while the drama and picturesqueness of his fall are stirringly described:

Il s'enfonçait dans l'ombre et la brume, effaré,
Seul, et, derrière lui, dans les nuits éternelles,
Tombaient plus lentement les plumes de ses ailes

This goes on for thousands of years while Satan, seized by an increasing panic at the inevitable extinction of sun after sun, seeks a refuge in which some spark of light remains. His fate is to enter into total darkness, alone. For Victor Hugo does not people this dread domain. Milton's fallen archangel had at least the consolation of much company, a mighty host over whom he held command. All that Hugo permits Satan is to engender a daughter, the veiled Specter Isis-Lilith, and to let her appear upon the earth.

Through this creature, Satan's daughter, evil is projected into the world of men. She brings to earth, as the waters of the great flood recede, three symbolic objects: a nail of bronze, a wooden club, and a stone. They happen to be the weapons with which Cain killed Abel. In Hugo's poem they stand for War, Capital Punishment, and Imprisonment.

Clou d'airain qui servit au bandit,
Tu t'appelleras Glaive et tu seras la guerre,
Toi, bois hideux, ton nom sera Gibet, toi, pierre,

Vis, creuse-toi, grandis, monte sur l'horizon,
Et le pâle avenir te nommera Prison

These three symbols will inspire three important sections of the epic, in which human drama will be enacted while in other parts (entitled "Hors de la terre") the angelic drama is unfolded. At least, such was Hugo's plan, but of the three sections, "Le Glaive," "Le Gibet," and "La Prison," he completed only the first two.

In "Le Glaive" appears the symbolic figure of Nemrod, according to the Bible a "mighty hunter before the Lord." Hugo clothes him with no such respectability. Taking his cue at least in part from J. J. Ampère's *Nembrod* (published in 1850) Hugo sees in the hunter a killer, a warrior, and finally a man of such stupendous arrogance as to undertake an aerial flight in order to attack the kingdom of God. Six sections of unequal length are devoted to Nemrod's earthly and aerial career. Under his deadly influence the human race has been inoculated with the virus of war, nation has been raised up against nation; and the earth has been turned into a cauldron of flame and destruction. But Nemrod's last venture spells his doom. A shepherd sees his body fall lifeless to the plain.

Couché sur le dos, mort, puni,
Le noir chasseur tournait encor vers l'infini
Sa tête aux yeux profonds que rien n'avait courbée

Auprès de lui gisait sa flèche retombée
La pointe, qui s'était enfoncée au ciel bleu,
Était teinte de sang. Avait-il blessé Dieu?

Had Nemrod really failed in his boldest adventure? The text seems to imply that, though punished, he had partially succeeded, for War is an evil which hurts God as well as man. Such is doubtless the symbolic significance of the blood on Nemrod's arrow.

Meanwhile, the angelic drama is being gradually unfolded. One of Satan's feathers had not fallen into the abyss. It lay,

white and pure, on the edge of the precipice. From this feather is born an angel: Liberty. Under the creative eye of God, writes the poet:

La plume tressaillit, brilla, vibra, grandit,
Prit une forme et fut vivante, et l'on eût dit
Un éblouissement qui devient une femme
Avec le glissement mystérieux d'une âme,
Elle se souleva debout et, se dressant,
Éclaira l'infini d'un sourire innocent,
Et les anges tremblants d'amour la regardèrent

Liberty is the offspring of Lucifer (and God), rather than of Satan, for we must remember that the great archangel had a double nature corresponding to his double career. As Lucifer he was one of the supporters of God, and the feather from which Liberty is born was a remnant of his happy and virtuous past. Liberty, the child of Lucifer, is, therefore, a counterpoise to Isis-Lilith, the daughter of Satan. The creation of Liberty is a clear proof that God had no intention of giving exclusive rights to evil, but intended that both evil and good should exist, providing, as we shall see, for the ultimate triumph of the latter. Moreover, not only was man to be saved, but Satan himself was to be redeemed. The redemption of Satan is entrusted by the poet to the angel Liberty. In somewhat similar fashion did Alfred de Vigny plan for the salvation of the Prince of Darkness in his own partially completed epic.

For the moment Hugo is satisfied with the creation of Liberty, and turns to the second section of the earth-drama, "Le Gibet," which he divides into three parts "La Judée," "Jésus-Christ," and "Le Crucifix." There are magnificent lines and passages scattered throughout this cycle. The anticlerical Hugo writes with his customary eloquence and irony when he contrasts the wise and gentle man of Galilee with the dogmatic and cruel leaders of the Jews. In "Le Cantique de Bethpagé" Hugo's lyricism bursts forth in a salute to physical love which

would, indeed, seem out of place in the midst of the tragic drama of Christ, did we not quickly realize that it is there merely as a foil to the greater and nobler love of one's fellow men which Jesus of Nazareth constantly displayed. The agony in the garden, the betrayal by Judas, the trial, and the crucifixion are treated by Hugo with that Biblical simplicity of which he had shown himself master in "Booz endormi." But the most brilliant passage is probably that section of "Ténèbres" in which the freed criminal, Barabbas, wandering in the night, hits against an obstacle which turns out to be the cross.

Tout en marchant, il heurte un obstacle, il le touche

Et tout à coup, hagard, pâle, il tâte des pieds,
Comme un hibou surpris rentre sous la feuillée,
Il retire sa main, elle est toute mouillée
Ces pieds sont froids, un clou les traverse, et de sang
Et de fange et de fiel tout le bois est glissant
Barabbas éperdu recule, son œil s'ouvre.
Épouvanté, dans l'ombre épaisse qui le couvre,
Et, par degrés, un blême et noir linéament
S'ébauche à son regard sous l'obscur firmament,
C'est une croix

And equally arresting is Barabbas' denunciation of a world capable of sending the good and innocent man to the gallows (le gibet) while the guilty is freed

Genre humain, ta noirceur en est là maintenant
Que le gibet saisis l'apôtre rayonnant,
Que sous le poids de l'ombre abjecte l'aube expire,
Et que lui, le meilleur, périt sous moi, le pire!
Oh! je baise sa croix et ses pieds refroidis,
Et, monstrueusement sauvé par toi, je dis
Malheur sur toi!

Here is capital punishment — judicial murder — in all its horror. The poet's indignation climaxes a campaign which he had conducted all his life against the death penalty. Of course

in the Bible, Barabbas' rôle is limited to the scene in which Christ and he appear before Pontius Pilate. In bringing him to the foot of the cross on the night of the crucifixion, Hugo changed the Biblical account without detracting from the effectiveness of his narrative

Meanwhile Satan wallows in the darkness of Hell where despair and remorse have at last entered his soul. He realizes now that he loves God and longs to return to the light. His daughter Liberty intervenes in his behalf. Guided to the bottomless pit by the archangel Winter, she brings to Satan the healing boon of sleep after first obtaining his permission to undo the terrible work of his other daughter Lilith. This leads us to the final section of the earth drama "La Prison." Only a few pages of this cycle were completed by Hugo, but his notes reveal that he intended to concentrate on the Bastille as the symbol of that third scourge of humanity let loose upon earth by Satan's malicious daughter. To speculate on the unwritten is useless, one can only pass on to the brief, incomplete conclusion. "Satan pardonné." Satan's remorse and the intervention of Liberty have been effective. God declares "Non, je ne te hais point," and explains

Un ange est entre nous, ce qu'elle a fait te compte
L'homme, enchaîné par toi, par elle est délivré
O Satan, tu peux dire à présent Je vivrai!
Viens, la prison détruite abolit la gehenne!
Viens, l'ange Liberté, c'est ta fille et la mienne
Cette paternité sublime nous unit
L'archange ressuscite et le démon finit,
Et j'efface la nuit sinistre et rien n'en reste
Satan est mort, renaiss, ô Lucifer céleste!

Liberty is then the instrument both of man's redemption and of Satan's

The problem raised by the conflict between Hugo's personal philosophy and Christian theology is solved by ignoring the orthodox doctrine of vicarious atonement, and by presenting

Christ's agony and crucifixion not as a part of a divine scheme but merely as a tragedy symbolic of an earthly evil. The rôle of redemption is given to a wholly new creation, the angel of Liberty, the daughter of God as well as of Lucifer-Satan. This means that both good and evil, as suggested by the poet in *Les Contemplations*, are necessary elements of the providential plan. Moreover, as Mr Hunt — who has made by far the best study of the *End of Satan* — so admirably says.

The theme of *felix culpa*¹ is here applied, not to the sin of Adam, but to the initial act whereby Lucifer, in willfully separating himself from the angelic fold, becomes the instrument of divine predestination and sets God's latest creation, man, on his upward path towards the love and knowledge of his Maker through the self-determination of free will. So envisaged, the angel of *la plume de Satan* sheds some of her disconcerting femininity, inconveniently inherited perhaps from *Éloa*, and strides forth, a brilliant and fearless figure, through the confines of metaphysic space to the accomplishment of her transcendental mission.¹

Incomplete though it may be, *La Fin de Satan* is a remarkable poem, arresting in its philosophy and brilliant in its poetic form. Its philosophy is not from the Christian point of view orthodox, yet many of Hugo's readers have been tempted to exclaim, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Its poetic beauties are incontestable. The fall of Satan for thousands of years into bottomless perdition, the creation of Liberty from a feather saved from that fall, the scenes depicting the passion of Christ, the admirable analysis of Satan's anguish, all these sections of the poem have won from competent critics the highest praise. As the reviewer of the royalist *Gazette de France* had to admit " . . . *la Fin de Satan* . . . contains perhaps the most beautiful lines Victor Hugo has ever written, the most grandiose and dramatic scenes he has ever composed."

¹H J Hunt, *op cit*, p 310

II

The mood that dominated Victor Hugo "on the edge of the infinite" inspired not only the final group of *Les Contemplations*, but also *Dieu*. Largely composed in 1855, though the whole first section, "Ascension dans les ténèbres," was added the following year, this work was viewed by the poet as the *couronnement* of his great epic trilogy. Yet, in spite of the poem's importance, Hugo hesitated to offer it to the public. At first he was dissuaded by Hetzel, his publisher, who, as we have seen, urged him to concentrate on the *Petites épopées*. After that he became absorbed in *Les Misérables*. He apparently returned to *Dieu* in 1875 when he was preparing the second series of the *Légende des siècles*. But the years again rolled by as dust accumulated on the manuscript. It was not until 1891, six years after Hugo's death that the poem found its way into print — slightly abbreviated in form, for Paul Meurice, who was in charge of its publication, was apprehensive of its public reception.

Dieu has never, of course, been a popular work. Nor has it received unanimous praise from the critics. But it is nonetheless a remarkable poem, displaying, in Mr. Hunt's effective phrase, "a stupendous labour of cerebration," as well as a brilliance of imagery and meter which Hugo had not very often surpassed.

The scheme of the poem is relatively simple. The poet sets out on a metaphysical adventure in which his mind, "being winged," undertakes a flight into darkness ("Ascension dans les ténèbres"). This is not the darkness of hell, it is the obscurity surrounding the metaphysical problem of the nature of God. The poet hopes to wing through this darkness into the clear light of revelation and certainty. A hazardous undertaking! as the very nature of the *Esprit humain* "whose name is legion" seems to suggest even before the poet has disclosed the goal of his journey. That disclosure is followed by the

momentary disappearance of the symbolic *Esprit humain*, overcome by the poet's boldness. It reappears, "grown to frightening proportions," accompanied by shadowy figures and by strident voices to the number of twenty-one. And these voices repeat over and over again the futility and the danger of the poet's search. *Prends garde à la recherche effrayante de Dieu!* For those who seek do not find, and sometimes return wounded. *portant de toutes parts les morsures du gouffre.*

Twenty-one voices may well seem excessive for the presentation of that particular idea. In fact, this section of the poem — "Les Voix" — contains much more. The tenth Voice, for example, raises the question *de quel Dieu veux-tu parler?* and then indulges in some very clever satire. The eleventh asks: *Est-ce que tu serais par hasard un poète?* and proceeds to depict the poet and to define his mission in lines as striking as any Hugo had ever composed on that subject. The eighteenth opposes materialistic determinism to the concept of a divinely fashioned universe. To illustrate this theory, Hugo describes the formation of the Pyrenees and in particular the Cirque de Gavarnie by far surpassing Alfred de Vigny's famous description of the Cirque du marboré in *Le Cor* or his equally famous description of the Pyrenees in his historical novel *Cinq-Mars*.² Such are some of the poetic jewels which shine forth from this contemplated flight into darkness.

The long central part of *Dieu* brings a series of apocalyptic visions in which some solution of the metaphysical problem is exposed. Substantially the same formula introduces each section. The first begins:

Et je vis au-dessus de ma tête un point noir
 Et ce point noir semblait une mouche du soir
 Volant à l'heure où l'ombre à prier nous invite
 Et, l'homme, quand il pense, étant ailé, j'eus vite
 Franchi l'éther qui s'ouvre à l'essor des esprits

Et cette mouche était une chauve-souris

² Chapter xxii

This Bat, of course, is symbolic. It represents atheism which stands condemned — according to the creature's own admission — as a mere doctrine of despair.

La nuit triste emplissait le ciel comme un géant,
Et la chauve-souris rentra dans l'ombre horrible,
Et j'entendis l'oiseau, disparu, mais terrible,
Qui criait

— Dieu n'est pas! Dieu n'est pas! désespoir!

In similar fashion the poet in his flight meets an Owl, "Hermes' bird," symbol of skepticism, a Raven, embodying Manicheism (the dualist system of Zoroaster), a Vulture, which stands for paganism and confesses that the gods of antiquity are but gods:

— Passant, sache les choses

Il est des dieux. Ils sont les dieux, mais non les causes

Then appears an Eagle expounding the Mosaic law and proclaiming the existence of the Hebrew Jehovah whose fact it has beheld. The Eagle's place is taken by a Griffon which refutes the Eagle and develops instead of the concept of a jealous God, the Christian ideal of mercy and forgiveness.

Clémence, c'est le fond de Dieu. Dieu boit le fiel.

Dieu, que l'homme coupable appelait, s'est penché,
Et, voyant l'univers sanglant mort, des-éche,
Et, songeant, pour lui-même et pour lui seul sévère,
Que pour sauver un monde il suffit d'un calvaire,
Il a dit: Va, mon fils! Et son fils est allé.

Rédemption! Mystère! O grand Christ étoilé!

With the Griffon the poet had passed from darkness (already weakened by a glimmer of light) into a penumbra more markedly suggestive of his progress. The next vision is that of an Angel surrounded by the blue firmament in which a strange dawn had cast a streak of gold. This august figure represents,

according to the subtitle, rationalism. And, indeed, the Angel proceeds to demolish certain aspects of Christianity in definitely rationalistic terms; only, however, to develop Hugo's favorite doctrine of metempsychosis "Tout vit, Création couvre métempsychose"

The last vision of the series is *La Lumière* with two white wings. It is "That which has not yet a name" and expounds some of the notions of noumenal philosophy. God is the unlimited and undefinable Being

Dieu, c'est le grand réel et le grand inconnu,
Il est . .

But God is also love "God is the limitless and endless light which says I love" So speaks *La Lumière* in the midst of what seems to be complete daylight in comparison with the darkness which surrounded the earlier stages of the poet's flight

Yet the final answer has not been given. Some measure of obscurity, imperceptible but real, lingers on even in that last eighth vision. One more experience remains. A shroud appears to the poet and from its folds is heard a voice which tells the poet that he has heard so far nothing but dreams and asks him if he still wishes to look upon the invisible "Wouldst thou touch the goal, wouldst thou look upon the invisible?"

— Oui! — crieai-je.

Et je sentis

Que la création tremblait comme une toile,
Alors, levant un bras et, d'un pan de son voile,
Couvrant tous les objets terrestres disparus
Il me toucha le front du doigt, et je mourus

Complete knowledge is not given to mortal man. The ultimate secret is revealed only in death.

This conclusion does not make the poem as negative and futile as one might think. The metaphysical and religious ideas set forth by the Angel and by *La Lumière* have still great in-

terest and validity. Granted that man cannot know with certainty the complete truth, he can nevertheless approach it. He can achieve such certainty as his finite and fallible nature allows him. The doctrines of the seventh and eighth visions represent, therefore, in the poet's view, the nearest approach to truth and certainty of which fleshly man is capable. That they are a reflection of Hugo's own religious philosophy is both inevitable and natural. Every sincere person considers his own philosophy the best and the truest; otherwise he would discard it for some other. What matters here is that Hugo has set forth his conceptions of metempsychosis and the nature of God with reasonable coherence and in magnificent poetry. To be sure, he is guilty of injustices and errors in some of his judgments of past philosophies. His ignorance of classical Greece leads him into a travesty of Greek religious concepts. He confuses, as Renouvier has shown, the monotheism of the Jews and that of the Brahmins. An orthodox Catholic would doubtless be offended by his presentation of the Christian system of rewards and punishments. But these are relatively minor criticisms. The fact remains that Hugo's range of thought is impressive and that his own philosophy is, as Mr. Hunt says, "a not unreasonable synthesis of relative certitudes." Not, of course, that the reader has to accept it. But the really unprejudiced reader must, I think, treat it with respect. In any event he must admire the epic sweep of this extraordinary poem as well as the power of its effulgent imagery.

III

Let us not forget that the poet who dreamed these dreams and beheld these visions was a man of flesh and blood. And he was, on the whole, a very robust man. Except for a serious carbuncle from which he suffered in 1858, Hugo enjoyed excellent health during his long exile. His regular life, his long walks, and his sea-bathing did him a world of good. He ate

incredible meals, sometimes consuming a lobster (including the shell) and winding up with four or five oranges, skin and all. But even his amazing vitality weakened a little in 1859 after the labor of the last few years. He was ordered to take a vacation, so he went in May to the near-by island of Sark where he spent several weeks.

Not long after his return to Guernsey Napoleon III proclaimed a general amnesty for all political exiles. Hugo could now return to Paris if he wished to do so. But he had declared in *Les Châtiments* that he would stay in exile to the bitter end — his own or that of Napoleon. He now reaffirmed that position. "True to the engagement I have made with my own conscience," he wrote, "I shall share to the end the exile of Liberty. When Liberty returns, I shall return." His family, we know, pined for Paris. They found it difficult to believe with him that "the real greatness of exile begins now." Posterity has recognized that he made the proper decision.

It gave him added prestige and lent weight to the words of protest which, whenever he thought it necessary, he sent winging through the world. One issue arose very soon to inspire his eloquence: the famous case of John Brown. The assault on Harper's Ferry occurred on October 16, 1859. Within forty-eight hours Colonel Robert E. Lee came from Washington with a company of Marines and laid siege to the house where Brown and a few of his men attempted to defend themselves. They fought till two sons of Brown were killed, then the father surrendered. He was tried before a Virginia court which was perhaps impressed by his "character of heroic simplicity, purity, and grandeur," but which nonetheless condemned him to be hanged. Outside of the South, world opinion was profoundly stirred. Victor Hugo shared the feelings of many, and he promptly penned a statement addressed to the United States of America in which he said.

At this very moment, in Washington's fatherland, in the Southern States — and this monstrous contradiction arouses the indignation of

the pure and logical conscience of the North—a white man, a free man, John Brown, has tried to liberate these negroes, these slaves . . . John Brown and four of his men . . . have been tried

All of us, whoever we may be, all of us whose common country is the symbol of democracy, feel ourselves injured and shamed by this sentence . . .

Brown's execution may perhaps reinforce slavery in Virginia, but it is certain that it will shake the whole structure of American democracy

Then, when the news of the hanging arrived Hugo, unable for once to find fitting words, turned to his artist's tools and sketched a picture of John Brown's body hanging from a gallows. Beneath it he wrote the word *Ecce*. It was a powerful picture, and when engraved it sold by the thousands.

Another cause for which he spoke was that of Italian liberty. In 1860 the Red Shirts of Garibaldi aroused the enthusiasm of democrats everywhere. Hugo was invited to speak at a meeting held on June 18, 1860 at Saint-Hélier. He did so with all the eloquence and fire of which he was capable. Little by little, he was coming to symbolize not only the Republic in the eyes of all Frenchmen, but Liberty in the eyes of all men throughout the world.

Meanwhile, literature was his lifework. In 1860 he returned to that old manuscript on which he had been laboring when the revolution of 1848 interrupted him. This primitive version which he had entitled *Les Misères* he was now to transform into the masterpiece of *Les Misérables*.

CHAPTER XIII

"LES MISÉRABLES," 1862

Les Misérables sont une vaste épopée
Et de sang et de boue et de larmes trempée,
Où tout est grand, profond, de splendeur revêtu,
Et le malheur plus saint encor que la vertu!

— A DESCHAMPS.

"DANTE," said Victor Hugo, "created a hell out of poetry; I have tried to create one out of reality." In these words the great exile underlined the realistic import of his mighty novel, *Les Misérables*, conceived early in his career and gestated over a period of nearly thirty years. Yet, in spite of characters taken from real life, in spite of the minute evocation of certain milieux, in spite of the importance given to the underprivileged classes of society, in spite of the sordidness which the author did not hesitate to depict, *Les Misérables* cannot be considered as an exclusively realistic novel.

Realism, to be sure, is almost as difficult to define succinctly as romanticism. For many, Balzac is the great realist, yet his work contains elements that hardly seem quite real. It has been said that there was never a father like old Goriot, and one might maintain with equal skepticism that there was never such an irresponsible old sensualist as the Baron Hulot. Nor does Stendhal offer a completely satisfactory example of realism either. The average man is of no interest to him. He likes heroes, or rather, scoundrels of an heroic mold. His method may be realistic, but his taste for the extraordinary is not. And Flaubert? In spite of *Madame Bovary*, a masterpiece of realism, he never considered himself a realist and still less a naturalist. "People think me in love with the real," he wrote, "whereas I hate it." He was far closer in temper and sympathy

to the Parnassian poets than to Balzac or to Zola. So perhaps we need not worry too much about the exact classification of Victor Hugo's novel. Let us be satisfied that the book is great; great because it contains certain characters who have achieved world-wide fame, great because it reflects so admirably some of the problems and beliefs of the nineteenth century, great because it relates so stirringly certain historical events, great above all because a profound human sympathy animates its every page. Once again we discover that, wittingly or not, Victor Hugo has gone beyond the limitations of any one school.

The splendor of *Les Misérables* has been frequently obscured by the abbreviations inflicted on the book by well-meaning editors and moving-picture producers. In school texts and the cinema emphasis has been laid on action, and the melodramatic conflict between Jean Valjean and Police Inspector Javert has taken the center of the stage. That conflict, of course, is not unimportant in the complete version, but there it is reduced to its proper proportions, there, it takes its place beside other elements of equal or even greater significance. The man-hunt, so dear to the movie devotee, is not permitted to outbalance the rest.

The chief justification of the abbreviators, if they but knew it, would be that originally the book was only about half its present length and in that early form centered more exclusively on the action involving Jean Valjean (who was then called Jean Tréjean), Bishop Myriel, Fantine, Cosette, Javert, and Marius. For, as already stated, the conception of *Les Misérables* goes back nearly thirty years. *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (1829) and *Claude Gueux* (1834) showed Hugo's preoccupation with social problems. What is more, both books contain details suggestive of an important item in *Les Misérables*. In the 1829 text the second of the two men condemned to death, the *friauche*, to use the technical slang adopted by Hugo, was guilty in the course of his career of stealing a loaf of bread for which he suffered heavy punishment. Again in

Claude Gueux the hero steals in order to provide his family with nourishment. It is, therefore, evident that at this early date Victor Hugo was concerned with the problem of poverty-made crime.

Furthermore, we know that in 1828 or 1829 Hugo's interest was attracted to the inspiring example of Christian charity offered by Mgr de Miollis, Bishop of Digne, and we also know, thanks to a nineteenth-century critic, Armand de Pontmartin, who interviewed in 1862 the surviving secretary of Bishop de Miollis, that among the Bishop's charitable acts was his hospitable and kindly reception of an ex-convict, one Pierre Maurin, who became under this benign influence an honest man, entered the army, and died at Waterloo. Maurin, moreover, had been guilty of stealing a loaf of bread and had spent five years in jail in consequence. Obviously, Bishop Myriel of *Les Misérables* was modeled on Mgr de Miollis, and to a less extent but quite definitely Tréjean-Valjean on Pierre Maurin. As early as 1832 Victor Hugo planned to make this episode the central action of a novel. He sold to Gosselin and Renduel rights to a two-volume work as yet unwritten but which was to include a section that, according to a later contract, bore the title of *Le Manuscrit de l'évêque*.

Absorbed in the theater, Victor Hugo failed to carry out these plans. But he never lost his interest, kept alive in part by certain contemporary productions. Balzac's propaganda novels, like *Le Médecin de campagne* and *Le Curé de village*, gave him an example of a novel with social implications. Balzac was a reactionary and his novels presented a social philosophy with which Hugo even in the thirties and forties could hardly agree, but the example was there. In the forties George Sand began her so-called socialistic period under the influence of Pierre Leroux and Michel (de Bourges). Her novels were sentimental and vague but they did have some social significance and were closer in spirit to Victor Hugo's humanitarianism than were Balzac's violent attacks on the French

Revolution and universal suffrage In 1842 and 1843 Eugène Sue published *Les Mystères de Paris*, a melodramatic serial novel wholly lacking in literary distinction, but clearly sympathetic with the sufferings of the people These examples undoubtedly stimulated Victor Hugo

After the failure of *Les Burgraves*, after the scandal of the *affaire* Biard which put a damper on Hugo's political career as Peer of France, the author of *Claude Gueux* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* turned again to the novel he had been contemplating and which had perhaps already inspired a good many pages¹ In any case he got to work on November 17, 1845 and soon gave his manuscript the significant title of *Les Misères*. He labored on it with that ardor and zeal of which he was so capable when aroused, delaying his dinner by two hours in order to lengthen his working day The pages accumulated rapidly under this intensity of composition Two volumes were very nearly completed and then the work was interrupted by the events of 1848 It was resumed briefly in 1851, interrupted again by the *coup d'État*, possibly concluded in its early form in Brussels in 1852 But Hugo's indignation at Napoleon III dominated his activity at this period *Napoléon-le-Petit*, the *Histoire d'un crime*, and *Les Châtiments* were the fruits of that noble wrath By the time he got to Guernsey Hugo was again devoted to the muse of poetry Finally in 1860 he took out of his trunk the manuscript of *Les Misères* Several months were spent in reading the text and in meditating upon it On January 1, 1861 he resumed composition, a laconic note simply saying: "Resumption of work" In March he went to Belgium, visited among other places the battlefield of Waterloo, and wrote from near-by Mont-Saint-Jean the great description of the battle which he placed at the beginning of the Second Part On the thirtieth of June he joyfully wrote, "I have finished *Les Misérables* on the battlefield of Waterloo and in the

¹ This depends on the status of the so-called *Manuscrit de l'évêque* It is possible that Hugo had composed some of it as early as 1831 or 1832

month of Waterloo." Yet a considerable work of revision and even some additional composition still lay ahead of him. It was not till May 19, 1862 that he was able to say, "I finished this morning at ten o'clock the complete revision of *Les Misérables*" Meanwhile the first volume, *Fantine*, had appeared. It was an unprecedented success and assured an even greater reception to the remaining volumes, the last of which was published on June 30 of the same year

! Except for the *Comédie humaine*, nothing like this had been seen in France. *Les Misérables* is, of course, more limited in scope than Balzac's series, yet the work surpasses in size any one of the Balzacian novels. The number of characters created is, within the given limits, on the Balzacian scale. To some extent, like the *Comédie humaine*, it is a history of the Restoration. And to some extent, again like the *Comédie humaine*, the struggle for existence is as important a theme as love. But there, it must be admitted, the comparisons come to an end. *Les Misérables* can hardly be considered the great *roman de mœurs* which is one of the *Comédie humaine's* claims to eternal fame. Balzac's work entirely lacks the essentially religious idea which animates *Les Misérables*. The social and political philosophy of the two authors is almost diametrically opposite.

Among the book's great characters the greatest and best-known are, of course, Bishop Myriel and Jean Valjean, who symbolize two of Victor Hugo's deepest convictions: the essential goodness of man and the reality of human redemption. In Bishop Myriel the author has given us a picture, based as we have seen on reality, of the good and just man, the ideal Christian, charitable, kind, forgiving, self-sacrificing, and sincere. This marvelous portrait would have won unanimous applause save for a few odd details. It is surprising to hear a Catholic bishop come very close to expressing belief in metempsychosis, it is positively startling to see him kneel before an old Revolutionary of 1793 and ask his benediction. Quite under-

standably, conservative Catholics were scandalized by such things and their protests were vehement. A surviving nephew of Mgr de Miollis wrote to the newspaper *L'Union* that Hugo had offended against truth as well as the proprieties, and later Bishop de Ségur called the book "infamous." To such criticisms Victor Hugo replied, "There is in *Les Misérables* a bishop who is good, sincere, humble, paternal, who is intelligent as well as gentle and who mingles all virtues in his benediction. That is why *Les Misérables* is an infamous book." And he might have added that the scene is not as impossible as most people suppose, for he was probably familiar with the death-bed story of an old Conventionnel of flesh and blood by the name of Sergent who refused to admit that his vote to send Louis XVI to the scaffold was at all sinful and of whom the attending priest said, "I wish that all of you when you appear before the Sovereign Judge, might have as pure a soul as this old man."² But such a reply, like the one actually made, really avoids the question. The truth is that Bishop Myriel is not merely a reflection of Mgr de Miollis, but also of Victor Hugo himself. If Myriel's career is, for the most part, like that of the benign bishop of Digne, his ideas are certainly very similar to those of the novelist. Like Victor Hugo, Myriel believes in free and universal education, like Victor Hugo he condemns capital punishment and is horrified by the sight of the scaffold, like Victor Hugo he believes in the possibility of human redemption. Of course these ideas were widespread. But the notion of megalomania and the attitude of the Bishop before the old Revolutionary are perhaps more markedly Hugolian. They were added by the poet many years after he had sketched the original portrait. In 1861 he included traits which he would not have thought of in 1845 or earlier. During that interval he had elaborated his personal philosophy and during that interval the features of Mgr de Miollis had doubtless grown dimmer in

² See article by B. Barberry, "L'Évêque et le Conventionnel des *Misérables*," *Mercur de France* (June 15, 1935).

his mind. The final picture of Bishop Myriel may be displeasing to the hidebound; it is nonetheless one of Victor Hugo's admirable creations.

Jean Valjean is even more the product of Hugo's imagination and his art, for the model, Pierre Maurin, served merely as an initial stimulus. The case of Maurin, plus Hugo's documentation, also serves to exculpate the novelist from the accusation of exaggeration. Immediately after publication of the book in 1862 it was charged that no one would ever be sent to the galleys for stealing bread and would certainly not be kept there for five years, subsequently stretched into nineteen by attempted escapes. But Hugo, concerned with the problem of realism, had consulted the *Code pénal des Chourmes* which completely supports his narrative.³ Jean Valjean committed his "crime" in 1795 at a time when the law did not provide for extenuating circumstances. If such evidence were deemed insufficient, the case of Pierre Maurin is there to prove the realism of Hugo's story.

Jean Valjean differs from many of Hugo's characters in that he definitely changes. Triboulet, Lucretia Borgia, and Claude Frollo have double natures. They are and they continue to be a combination of evil and good. But Jean Valjean is converted and becomes a new man. Not that he was originally by nature a criminal. Far from it. The motive which led him to steal was certainly not vicious. In desperation he was seeking to provide food for hungry children, his sister's offspring. But his years of prison hardened him. "He had for his motives," says Hugo, "habitual indignation, bitterness of soul, the profound feeling of iniquities endured, and reaction even against

³ He also consulted for the other details the *Ratons des Chourmes du bagne de Toulon en 1823*. He cut out of the *Moniteur universel* (of 1846) an article on "Le vagabondage et les Mesures adoptées pour sa repression anterieurement à 1789." Further evidence of his desire to be realistic is furnished by the source of his narrative of Jean Valjean's escape from the *Orion*. Here he used material sent him by the Baron La Ronciere de Nourry on the rescue of a sailor by a convict on board a ship in Toulon harbor.

the good, the innocent, and the just, if such exist." When, therefore, he entered the town of Digne in October 1815, he was indeed a dangerous man.

His conversion is skillfully manipulated. It does not come too soon. His reception by Bishop Myriel obviously impresses him. But he is still far enough from virtue to steal the Bishop's silverware. When Myriel makes him a present of his theft, gives him his silver candlesticks to boot, and frees him from the officers who had caught him, Jean Valjean is again obviously impressed. But he is still not wholly converted, and he steals a piece of money from a child, Petit Gervais. It is only when the realization of what he has done sweeps over him that the full import of the Bishop's parting words, "It is your soul I am redeeming. I withdraw it from black thoughts and from the spirit of perdition and I give it to God," overcomes his resistance, breaks down his defenses, and for the first time in nineteen years he weeps.

From then on Jean Valjean is a symbol of all that is good in human nature. As Father Madeleine of Montreuil-sur-mer he is the good businessman, the admirably just as well as efficient mayor, the benevolent philanthropist. Forced back into his true character with the disclosure of the imminent condemnation to the galleys of père Champmathieu who has been identified as Jean Valjean, he grapples again with evil. From this ordeal, minutely analyzed in the chapter, *Une Tempête sous un crâne*, he emerges triumphant, saves Champmathieu in time, and goes again to the galleys. After his escape, his life is a long record of devotion and self-sacrifice to Cosette, the daughter of Fantine. The record was nearly marred when Jean Valjean (now known as M. Fauchelevent) discovers the love of Marius de Pontmercy for Cosette. But there again virtue is triumphant and Jean Valjean is able not only to dominate his jealousy but to save the life of Marius and make possible the marriage of the pair. Yet a new ordeal still awaited him, for in spite of his frank confession to Marius of his real

identity, the latter becomes suspicious of Jean Valjean's past, and separates him from Cosette. The end of his sacrifice coincides with the end of his life. Marius learns the truth only just in time to bring Cosette to Jean Valjean's bedside and to give him a moment of happiness before he dies.

Now such a life might have been presented with nauseating sentimentality. Victor Hugo successfully avoided that pitfall. He has described Jean Valjean's paternal love — for the relationship between him and Cosette is essentially that of father and child — with the same moving simplicity which distinguished the poems of *Pauca meae* in *Les Contemplations*. Posterity as well as Hugo's contemporaries recognized the greatness of the portrait. Jean Valjean is known the world over as the type of the redeemed man, saved by Christian charity from evil, and transformed into a character of exemplary goodness and kindness.

In Cosette and Marius we see a reflection of Victor Hugo's own youth. Cosette is to some extent modeled on the Adèle Foucher whom Victor Hugo loved and married in 1822. But in the beginning she is just a little girl in need of kindness and protection. Later, she blossoms out into a beautiful adolescent. It is then, of course, that she resembles Adèle: it is then that she becomes quite the nineteenth-century *jeune fille française*, a combination of grace, charm, and innocence. There is really not much more to be said about her.

Marius, on the other hand, is an interesting character in whom Hugo depicts much of his own youthful aspirations and political idealism. As we saw in the first chapter, the poverty which Marius endured after his break with his grandfather resembles Hugo's own poverty in the rue du Dragon after his mother's death. When the author said of Marius' privations that "destitution engenders greatness of soul and mind" he knew from personal experience what he was talking about. After Marius meets Cosette, he worships her in the same ultra-romantic fashion that the twenty-year-old Victor Hugo wor-

shipped Adèle Foucher. The pages devoted to this idyl seem like an echo from the *Lettres à la Fiancée*. The same fervor and exaltation are present. And yet in spite of this sentimental recollection of his courting of Adèle, Victor Hugo chooses as the wedding day for Cosette and Marius the date of February 16, 1833! Thus their nuptial night coincides with the beginning of Victor Hugo's liaison with Juliette Drouet. A strange man, Hugo

To return to Marius, he passes through an intellectual evolution closely similar to the author's. At first, under his grandfather's influence he was strongly royalist — "royaliste, fanatique et austère" — even as Hugo had been while under his mother's domination. Then, when Marius learned the truth about his father, he became under this new influence an even more ardent Bonapartist. Later, without giving up his admiration for Napoleon, he became democratic, a "démocrate-bonapartiste." Again the analogy with Hugo is obvious. But, unlike Victor Hugo, Marius fought for his convictions on the barricades. Perhaps in 1861 the novelist regretted that he had not done so in his youth.

Other memorable characters grace the pages of *Les Misérables*. Javert, thanks to the abbreviators and to motion pictures, is as well known as Jean Valjean, perhaps better known than he deserves to be. Edmond Biré admired him inordinately, but to the present writer he is a far less interesting character than many others in the book. Among them is M. Gillenormand, the *grand bourgeois*, a salty, pigheaded, tyrannical old royalist — an altogether admirable, lively portrait. Then there is the immortal Gavroche, the *gamin de Paris*, witty, impudent, and clever, heroic, too, as his death before the barricades amply reveals. There is Enjolras, the young political idealist, who nobly fights and nobly dies in the insurrection of 1832. There is M. Mabeuf, church warden (*marguillier*), naturalist and scholar, a gentle soul, indifferent to political disputes, who also dies on the barricades, red flag in hand,

after poverty has driven him to sell his last beloved volume. There are Thénardier and his ugly wife, as consummate evil-doers as have ever appeared in fiction. By one of those quirks of heredity which now and then occur, they have produced some children of a different stamp. Gavroche is one of them. So are those two little boys who suddenly find themselves adrift in Paris with no lodging for the night. Momentarily taken in tow by Gavroche who is quite unaware of their identity, they later glide across the scene and their worried, childish faces wring one's heart. And the elder daughter of Thénardier, Éponine,⁴ is one of Hugo's most brilliant and moving creations. To the present writer she seems more real than Fantine,⁵ the seduced and abandoned girl. In the latter's situation, pitiful as it may be, there is something so obviously conventional, or perhaps one should say trite, that in comparison with the Thénardier girl she touches the reader less. But Éponine, as terrible a victim of environment as can be imagined, the hapless daughter of a mean father and a vicious mother, is a genuine flower growing on a dunghill. Not unspotted, to be sure, but fundamentally still unspoiled. Her hopeless, self-sacrificing love for Marius provides one of the really tragic moments of this extraordinary book.

The action in which all these characters are engaged is, of course, complex and rather loosely knit. As in the case of Jules Romains' *Hommes de bonne volonté* we frequently lose sight of one group of characters while the author turns his spotlight on another. The central action of *Les Misérables* involves Jean Valjean and those who come importantly into contact with him. It is frequently melodramatic: the man-hunt, the ambushing of M. Fauchelevent by Thénardier, the rescue of Marius, are a few of the exciting elements of the action. But while the melodrama of *Les Misérables* is not always credible, indeed, at times because of the accumulation of coincidences

⁴ She was named Palmyre in *Les Misères*.

⁵ For the origin of Fantine see *Choses Vues* (under the date of 1841).

quite unbelievable, it nevertheless seems on the whole more rational than the melodrama of *Hernani* or *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The antitheses seem more natural. Certainly the reader is far less conscious of artificiality. Merely as a novel of action or adventure *Les Misérables* stands up under critical scrutiny fairly well.

This central action is almost submerged in a flood of digressive and episodic material which swells the work to four fat volumes.⁶ For this Victor Hugo has been severely censured. Even such favorable critics as M. Berret and M. Levailant reproach him for "des longueurs" and "des digressions." And, of course, the digressions do slow down the action; there can be no doubt of it. But, except for some fanatical abbreviators, I know few readers who would willingly sacrifice the description of the battle of Waterloo, or the convent episode, or the insurrection of 1832, or the two brilliant pages in which Hugo describes the death of a man in quicksand, or even the chapter on the sewers of Paris.

The brilliance, color, and movement of Waterloo recall the text of "L'Expiation." Here the canvas is larger and, therefore, allows more details—details which Hugo got from many sources, from his own observation while staying at Mont St. Jean, from the *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* of Charles de Lacretelle, from diverse maps, from his personal researches in the Royal Library of Brussels. In spite of these conscientious efforts to relate the truth, he did not succeed in putting together a narrative which completely satisfies the historian. The general effect is nevertheless sound. Perhaps the French cavalry did not fall in confusion into the sunken road of Ohain (le chemin creux d'Ohain) as Hugo claims,⁷ but they did charge with unbelievable fire and courage. What cannot be

⁶ Octavo format. In smaller size the volumes sometimes run to ten.

⁷ That such a road existed (though it was not sunken for its whole length) is clear from the excellent account of Lt. Col. S. C. Pratt, *The Waterloo Campaign* (London and N. Y., 1907), pp. 157-160. Hugo's narrative at this point probably refers to the charge by Milbaud's men, prematurely ordered by Ney at

contested is that Hugo has caught the essential drama of that fateful June Sunday. As in "L'Expiation" he sees that the destiny of a man, Napoleon, the destiny of a country, France, the destiny of a continent, Europe, were at stake. And as the cuirassiers of Milhaud make their headlong charge, as the Imperial Guard marches majestically into the fray, as the tide of battle turns, and the Grande Armée tastes the bitter brew of defeat and utter rout, the reader realizes that then as today there are great moments in history that constitute important turning-points. In these pages of Victor Hugo he is in the presence of one of them. Who would willingly suppress these pages?

The convent episode, *Le petit Picpus*, is not thrilling, but it has undeniable charm. Even though Hugo transported the convent to another section of the city, saying in a note:

Today, because of the régime and possible difficulties, I have had to move the convent, change its name, and transport it in imagination to the Saint-Antoine quarter (January 25, 1862),

the description does not lack realism. Many items were furnished to Victor Hugo by Juliette Drouet, for she had been brought up in the convent of the Dames de Sainte-Madeleine. It was from her that he got a good many details of convent life, including that delightful story of a seven-year-old sinner who wrote out on a piece of paper what she intended to confess:

Father, I accuse myself of having been avaricious

Father, I accuse myself of having been adulterous

Father, I accuse myself of having raised my glances toward men

Other details came from a manuscript entitled *Couvents*, preserved in the *Reliquat*. This manuscript is neither in Hugo's handwriting nor in Juliette's. Whatever its source, it was of the greatest value to the author.⁸ But the principal charm of

4 00 P.M., across the valley between Houyoumont and La Haie toward the Ohain road which few of them crossed. See Pratt's account.

⁸ See A. Le Breton, "Réalité et fiction. Le vrai Petit-Picpus des *Misérables*," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (July 15, 1925).

this episode lies in its tranquility, its calmness, its peace. After the tempest of Waterloo and the excitement of Javert's pursuit, the respite is welcome. The reader feels that Jean Valjean deserves a little relief from his ordeals and the reader himself is not unwilling to linger a bit in this port in a storm.

As for the insurrection of 1832, it is definitely one of the important episodes in the book, almost impossible to eliminate. Indeed, it would be monstrous to eliminate it. The ideas involved will be discussed in a later paragraph. Here we are concerned with the narrative. Its general authenticity is well established. Hugo says he witnessed some of the fighting himself from the *Passage du Saumon*. The day after, Jules Resseguier gave him an eye-witness account of the defense of the Saint-Merry cloister. But, above all, he read attentively the carefully documented novel of Rey-Dusseuil, *Le Cloître Saint-Méry*, published in September 1832. In this book (which was quickly suppressed) Hugo found a complete account of the insurrection, from the funeral of General Lamarque and the rôle of policemen as *agents provocateurs* to characters who served as models for Enjolras and Gavroche.⁹ But the color and drama of Hugo's narrative are essentially his own. The means by which he linked this episode to the rest of the book is both skillful and original. Paul Meurice was not an impartial critic, but he was, I think, right in saying, "It is a sublime idea to have brought together there on the barricades, all these sufferings in the midst of all these ideas, Marius, Mabeuf, Éponine, Jean Valjean with Enjolras, the friends of the A B C, and Javert." The tragic and beautiful deaths of Mabeuf, Éponine, Gavroche, and last of all Enjolras heighten the sacrifice which the inevitable failure of the insurrection demanded of all its participants. Far from being an inconsequential episode, a kind of hors d'œuvre, the *Épopée rue Saint-Denis* becomes, thanks to Hugo's skill, an integral, almost a central part of the book.

⁹ For other possible sources of Gavroche, see the interesting article by Régis Messac, "Autour de Gavroche," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1928).

Few critics have objected to the use of the Parisian sewer-system as a means of escape for Jean Valjean and Marius. It may be unusual, but it is perfectly logical. Criticism has centered on the chapters collectively entitled "L'Intestin de Paris." And, indeed, those chapters are anything but appetizing. Hugo's argument on the efficacy of sewerage as a fertilizer may interest the agriculturist, may even amuse the sardonic reader, but the average reader, impatient to get on with the tale, is doubtless repelled. The history of the sewer system, carefully documented from a *Statistique des égouts*, following this initial discussion is more pertinent and it certainly helps the reader to appreciate Jean Valjean's feat in emerging successfully from this foul labyrinth. Once, he almost succumbed, for he ran into a *fontis* (a kind of pocket of slime and filth without a firm bottom). This provoked the brilliantly written comparison of the man fatally bogged in quicksands, a *morceau* which has appeared in numerous anthologies and which is justly famous. Without the sewers, we might not have had this celebrated description.

Stripped of all its digressions *Les Misérables* would still be an interesting book, containing an essentially great lesson, but it would be much less a book extraordinarily representative of the nineteenth century. In its final form it gives us not only the lesson of Jean Valjean, but it gives us some of the great deeds and important ideas of the century. For in this definitive version it is more than a novel of action and character, it is also and above all a novel of ideas.

Religion, politics, and economics are of deep concern to the author of *Les Misérables*. We have seen it in his poetry and are naturally not surprised to see it again in his prose. Indeed, at the threshold of his tale, Victor Hugo took pains to suggest the social implications of the pages to come:

So long as by the effect of laws and of customs, social degradation continues in the midst of civilization, making artificial hells, and subjecting to the complications of chance the divine destiny of man; so

long as the three problems of the age, the debasement of man into proletarian, the ruin of woman by hunger, the destruction of the child by darkness, are not solved, so long as in certain areas social syncopes are possible, in other words, and from a still broader point of view, so long as ignorance and poverty remain on earth, books like this cannot fail to be useful

And the title itself emphasizes the author's interest in the underprivileged groups of society, and hence in the organization of society.

What is the rôle of religion in the scheme of *Les Misérables*? The author's ideas are presented through the characters of Bishop Myriel and Jean Valjean and in the episode of *Le Petit Picpus*. They are summed up in the sentence. "We are for religion against religions" The phrase reveals what we have already seen from Hugo's poetry, that the novelist was a genuinely religious man but one quite indifferent, even hostile, to religious forms and ceremonies, to religious organizations, to orthodox dogmas Bishop Myriel, as we have already seen, is a personification of this attitude, always excepting the fact that he was an officer of an established church. Apart from that anomaly his views were similar to Victor Hugo's He could, therefore, kneel before the Conventionnel of '93, something which no ordinary orthodox Catholic could conceivably do. It may be said that there is no real contradiction between Victor Hugo's anticlericalism and his sympathetic portrait of Bishop Myriel, for he has in reality painted a picture of the kind of bishop he admired but who, for that very reason, could not exist Perhaps that was what he meant when he denied having used any living person for the portrait and claimed that the Bishop was entirely his own creation.

Nor is there any great contradiction between Hugo's picture of the convent and his hostility to religious institutions For he always recognized that such institutions had a noble side He says as much in his text:

When we speak of convents, those homes of error but of innocence, of

wanderings from the true path but of good intentions, of ignorance but of devotion, of torture but of martyrdom, we must almost always say yes and no.

And Hugo recognizes the beneficial influence of the convent on Jean Valjean when he said: "Everything that had entered his life (Valjean's) during the past six months, led him back to the Bishop's sacred injunctions, Cosette by love, the convent by humility." This recognition of convents' virtues makes the author's condemnation of their limitations and dangers all the more effective.

Although the central idea of the book, redemption of human nature by charity and goodness, is an essentially religious idea, political questions play as large a part in the composition of *Les Misérables* as does religion. They were in fact one of the original elements, for the text of *Les Misères* shows that already in 1845-1847 the insurrection of 1832 was part of the action. Nevertheless we can properly assert that as the book developed political ideas were given progressively greater weight. The point of view naturally shifted, for the exiled republican held quite different opinions from the Peer of France. Not that Hugo entirely repudiated his past. His portrait of Louis-Philippe, composed in 1861, shows that he had not forgotten the associations and loyalties of the forties. The portrait is on the whole a favorable one, attributing the mistakes and crimes of the régime — the massacre in the rue Transnonain, for example — to the monarchical system rather than to the king himself. It recognizes Louis-Philippe's kindness and conscientiousness and declares that, judged merely as a man, Louis-Philippe was "one of the best princes who ever mounted a throne."

The political opinions of the exiled Hugo are to be found in the portrait of Marius and in the discussion of the Amis de l'ABC. Marius and his swing to Bonapartism existed, of course, in the early version of *Les Misères*. So did the characters Enjolras, Courfeyrac, and Combeferre. But the *Friends*

of the Under-dog (for $A B C = \text{Abaissé}$) were introduced later in 1861, and they play a vital rôle in Marius' final evolution to democracy. When Marius in his new enthusiasm for Napoleon asks what can be greater than the emperor's achievements, Combeferre replies simply *To be free!* Years before, Hugo had revealed essentially the same attitude in "L'Expiation," for if the poem glorifies the emperor, it nonetheless condemns the *Dix-huit Brumaire* as a crime to be expiated. Hugo's position, then, is fundamentally compatible with his political record. The only trouble is that in much of his work he commits what may be called a sin of emphasis. Whenever the name of Napoleon arises, the eulogy of his achievements, of his military triumphs, usually receives far greater space than the denunciation of his crimes. But it must be realized that after 1851 the denunciation is implied and sometimes made explicit. For after his experience with Napoleon-the-Little Hugo was a sincere republican.

Was he a socialist as well? In his early manuscript he had stated his belief in a benevolent capitalism as practiced by M. Madeleine. That text, which we quoted in a previous chapter, he left intact in 1861. The final version of the book gives further details of his position. Concerning the double problem of the production and distribution of wealth he says:

Solve both problems, encourage the rich and protect the poor, abolish poverty, put an end to the unjust exploitation of the weak by the strong, bridle the iniquitous jealousy which the man still on the road feels for him who has reached the journey's end, adjust mathematically and fraternally wages to labor, add free, obligatory education to the growth of childhood and make knowledge the basis of manhood, develop intelligence while providing work, be at once a powerful people and a family of happy men, democratize property, not by abolishing it but by universalizing it, so that every citizen without exception may be a land-owner — an easier task than may be supposed —, in two words, know how to produce wealth and to distribute it, and you will possess simultaneously material and moral greatness, and you will be worthy to call yourself France

This is a long quotation but an important one, for it contains Victor Hugo's program. He called it socialism, and in that he was wrong. Neither Marx nor the French utopian socialists would have recognized it as such. It is humanitarianism, progressivism, Jeffersonian democracy, but it is not real socialism.¹⁰ It is, however, an unselfish if somewhat naive philosophy and the whole book with its concern for the underprivileged is a noble book.

Hugo's eloquent narrative of the 1832 insurrection raises the question of his position on the whole problem of reform by violence or by vote. In the chapter entitled "La Charybde du Faubourg Saint-Antoine et la Scylla du Faubourg du Temple" all but a few lines of which was composed in 1861, he speaks of the June Days of 1848. At the time he had opposed the insurrection, but in 1848 his political education had hardly begun. In 1861 he still says that the June uprising had to be overcome — "It had to be fought for it attacked the Republic" — but he certainly recognizes far more clearly than in 1848 that the June Days were caused by the poverty and hunger of the workers. In this insurrection, he writes, "one felt the sacred anxiety of labor claiming its rights." Now the uprising of 1832 was caused less by hunger than by political idealism. On the other hand it occurred under a monarchy, not a republic. The monarchical régime in question was more liberal than the immediately preceding one but it was still far from being genuinely democratic. In 1861 Hugo obviously thinks that the existence or absence of universal suffrage makes an enormous difference. He had already expressed that opinion in 1850, when he declared in the chamber that to adulterate universal suffrage could have no other result than to re-establish the right of insurrection. In *Les Misérables* he says: "The

¹⁰ I cannot agree with those who see in Hugo's program a reflection of Fourierism. It is true that Fourier wished to universalize property, but this ideal is inseparable from his belief in association, in the organization of men into "Phalanges." There is no evidence that Hugo considered the "Phalange" to be practicable.

admirable thing about universal suffrage is that it abolishes revolt in its principle and that by giving the vote to insurrection it deprives it of its arms" The movement of 1832 was, in Hugo's eyes, an insurrection, not a mere uprising (*émeute*). He could view it with considerable tolerance since universal suffrage did not exist.

Few things mark more vividly Hugo's evolution than his attitude toward the insurrection of 1832 and his changing opinion of 1793 In 1832 he wrote to Sainte-Beuve: "We shall have a Republic some day But we must not gather in ' May the fruit which will not be ripe until August . . . The Republic proclaimed by France in Europe will be the crown of our old age But we must not let our flag *be smeared with red by these boors* (*goujats*)" Fifteen years later, in 1847, these *goujats* had become admirable characters, Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Combeferre, Marius de Pontmercy Another fifteen years saw these men crowned with the laurels of intense political idealism It is in the 1861 version that Hugo attributes to Enjolras that vibrant, eloquent, remarkable speech which declares his unshakable faith in the progress of France and humanity¹¹ In the 1830's and 1840's Victor Hugo always looked on 1793 with disapproval In *Les Misérables* he portrays a modern Saint-Just in the person of Enjolras whom he certainly glorifies And the old Conventionnel of 1793, whom he introduced in the first part of the novel, plays, as we have observed, a brief but favorable rôle in the significant scene between Bishop Myriel and himself

The fact is that *Les Misérables* breathes forth the ardent republicanism and the deep humanitarianism of the great exile. Like *La Légende des siècles* the book reposes on an undying faith in human progress Like *Les Contemplations*, it is infused with genuine religious sentiment, unorthodox, but profoundly sincere These conceptions and these sentiments are not only set forth as abstractions, but are illustrated in concrete form

¹¹ The chapter entitled "Quel horizon on voit du haut de la barricade"

by characters remarkable for their vitality and credibility. Conceptions, sentiments, and characters are involved in an action doubtless loosely knit, at times over-melodramatic, perhaps too often interrupted by digressions, but an action which nevertheless holds the reader's interest to the end. If *Les Misérables* is not, as Paul Meurice with pardonable enthusiasm said, *the* book of the nineteenth century, it is indubitably one of the great books of that productive era, and it remains singularly alive and significant today, eighty long and tumultuous years since it first appeared in the bookshops of Western Europe.

CHAPTER XIV

"WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE" AND THE "CHANSONS DES RUES ET DES BOIS," 1864-1865

C'est un rêve étrange de vouloir
retirer la critique au poète Qui
donc, mieux que le mineur, con-
naît les galeries de la mine?

— V H

THE stupendous success of *Les Misérables* came shortly after Hugo's sixtieth birthday and seemed to climax an already long and distinguished career. Later in the year a great banquet, organized by the author's publishers, and attended by men of letters, scientists, journalists, and some of the Belgian political notables, was held in Brussels on September 16, 1862. Louis Blanc and Théodore de Banville made two of the speeches heard that evening, all in eulogy of the poet. He himself delivered an oration on the power and freedom of the press, and declared in an impassioned peroration that "the hour approaches when humanity, freed from the dark tunnel of six thousand years, suddenly brought face to face with the sunlight of the ideal, will make its sublime escape into the dazzling radiance." Not long after this memorable evening he returned to Guernsey.

He was now, thanks to *Les Misérables*, in a much more comfortable position, financially speaking. But even though the royalties rolled in, he remained careful and prudent in money matters, keeping watch over his expenditures and seeing to it that he lived well within his means. At the same time he was reasonably generous, and answered more than one appeal for aid.¹ The most extensive of his charities at this period was the Poor Children's Dinners, begun in March 1862 and held every

¹ Hugo has been frequently accused of avarice. On this point, one should read

other Sunday evening in the billiard room at Hauteville House. Some forty or fifty children came regularly and they were served by neither butler nor maid, but by Victor Hugo himself, with the assistance of his wife and sons

Charles, to be sure, as a theoretical socialist, disapproved of these handouts. The proper solution of the problem of poverty, he held, was in a reorganization of the economic system. Such bits of alms were mere palliatives, and even tended to retard more radical and, therefore, permanent solutions. So he argued quite heatedly with his illustrious father who refused to abandon his favorite charity.

Whether this dispute was the cause of Charles's departure from Guernsey is uncertain. The fact is that he had been restive for a long time, and in 1863 he left the island and established himself in Brussels where a couple of years later he married Mlle Alice La Haene.

Meanwhile, the other son, François-Victor, was absorbed in his monumental translation of Shakespeare which he wanted to finish in time for the 250th Anniversary of the English poet's death. In this task he was very much encouraged by his father who had by no means forgotten his own contribution—in the *Préface de Cromwell*—to the discussion of Shakespeare in France. In fact, Victor Hugo was persuaded to write a preface for his son's edition, but when he set to work on it he discovered he had so many ideas to express that a mere preface would not suffice. He decided then to write a book. This is the origin of his *William Shakespeare* which he published in 1864. The preface he composed for his son's translation appeared in 1865 in the fifteenth volume.

The book is neither a biography of Shakespeare nor a critical study of his work. It is rather a long essay on some of the great geniuses of our civilization with rather more emphasis on the English dramatist than on any other. In the phrase of a

the testimony of Henri de Rochefort in *Les Aventures de ma vie* (Paris, 1896), II, 51.

recent critic it is both "absurd and profound" Absurd, because the notion that Shakespeare is, almost literally, a reincarnation of Aeschylus can hardly be judged otherwise. Profound, because Hugo's perception of the difference between the normal man with "a normal consciousness and a normal faith, a normal doubt, a normal virtue" and the poet-prophet who ventures "out on that fearful promontory of thought from which one perceives the shadows (*les ténèbres*)" and his application of that distinction to such writers as Aeschylus and Shakespeare is of genuine metaphysical and literary interest.

For Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, like some other great geniuses, was a man who "believed profoundly in the mystery of things" When one reflects on the rôle of the irrational and supernatural in plays like *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Hugo's judgment appears sound Whether his analysis of Hamlet would be acceptable to modern critics is another matter, but that analysis is both suggestive and stimulating For he sees in Hamlet a Prometheus rather than an Orestes, a misanthrope rather than a courtier, a thinker rather than a prince He is more:

Hamlet A kind of frightening creature complete in the incomplete Everything, to be nothing He is prince and demagogue, wise and foolish, profound and frivolous, man and no-man² He believes but little in the scepter, scoffs at the throne, has a student for a comrade, chats with the passers-by, argues with the first comer, understands the people, scorns the mob, hates force, suspects success, interrogates the powers of darkness, speaks on familiar terms with mystery (*tutoie le mystère*) He frightens, then disconcerts Never has anything more overwhelming been dreamed of

This is but a small part of Hugo's commentary which Professor Peyre calls "admirable de divination."

To the student of French literature *William Shakespeare* offers other interests It contains Victor Hugo's ideas on two highly important literary problems discussed by the nineteenth

² Hugo's phrase, difficult to translate, is "homme et neutre"

century. The first of these is the idea of progress as applied to literature. The old conception of Charles Perrault at the end of the seventeenth century, taken up and refurbished by Mme de Stael at the beginning of the nineteenth, that literature of any contemporary period must be — provided that genius be equal — superior to the literature of the past, met an unexpected adversary in Victor Hugo. Unexpected, because Victor Hugo believed fervently, as we have seen, in progress; not merely mechanical progress, but what is more important, spiritual progress. Yet he rejects without equivocation the notion of the inevitable perfectibility of art. "From Phidias to Rembrandt," he says, "there is motion, not progress." Progress is possible in science, not in creative literature. "Pascal, the scientist, has been surpassed, Pascal, the writer, has not." And he categorically proclaims "Art is not perfectible."

These are important statements made at an important time. Not that the precise idea set forth by Mme de Stael was threatening to sweep over Europe in 1864. But science and materialism were steadily making their imprint on literature. The positivism of Comte and the determinism inherent in Darwin were affecting both critical and creative writers. Later in the century Anatole France confessed that *The Origin of the Species*³ was the Bible of his generation. Hippolyte Taine, who belonged to that generation, published in 1864 his well-known introduction to his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*. It bore the famous, not to say notorious, epigraph *Le vice et la vertu sont des produits comme le vitriol et le sucre*, and made a powerful attempt to apply the notion of determinism to literary criticism. Hugo's *William Shakespeare* offset, to some extent, this influential work of Taine.

The other literary problem discussed by Hugo is that of restraint versus exuberance in poetry. He was doubtless thinking of the group of poets soon to be called Parnassians who rejected the Romantic conception of spontaneity and fecundity.

³ The first French translation appeared in 1862.

in favor of chiseled perfection and sobriety Upon them Hugo pours the most withering scorn:

A certain school called "serious" has recently set up this program of poetry: sobriety It seems that the whole question is to protect literature from indigestion Formerly one said fecundity and power, today one says. camomile tea

Would you write the *Iliad*, go on a diet Ah! no use in staring, Rabelais!

Shakespeare, whom Hugo does not wholly forget, is invoked to support this general position "If ever a man did not deserve the good mark: *He is restrained*, it is certainly William Shakespeare." From every point of view, therefore, Victor Hugo's discourse on the great English poet was a timely volume. That much, at least, can be said for it without fear of refutation ⁴

Meanwhile, the translator of Shakespeare, François-Victor Hugo, whose work had inspired his father's volume, carried his own labors to a successful conclusion He had been aided in the great task by Mlle Émilie de Putron, a local enthusiast of the English bard, and he proceeded to fall in love with her. But their engagement, announced in 1864, never led to matrimony, for Mlle de Putron was taken seriously ill the following year and succumbed to her malady François-Victor, inconsolable, could no longer endure Guernsey, and left for Paris.

Except for Juliette Drouet, Victor Hugo was now practically alone His daughter Adèle had just gone through a grievous experience She had run off, against her father's wishes, with a young English officer named Pinson who soon deserted her. François-Victor was dispatched to bring her home, and he performed this service for the family before establishing himself in Paris. Adèle, on her return, insisted that she had been properly married But whether she had or not, the whole ex-

⁴ There is quite an important *Reliquat* for this volume, containing interesting discussions, in particular one on translations See the Ollendorff edition, also an article by C. Daubray in the *Revue de France*, March 15, 1937

perience affected her mind, and in 1865 she had to be put in an asylum where she was destined to linger until the year of her death, 1915. Once again destiny redressed the balance of Hugo's life. the great success of *Les Misérables* found its counterweight in this domestic tragedy

After Charles's departure in 1863, Mme Hugo made frequent trips to Brussels. Now that François-Victor was in Paris, she made additional journeys there, and with the disappearance of Adèle from the Guernsey scene, Mme Hugo had still less reason to inhabit Hauteville House. She stayed away for long intervals, and, in her absence, the establishment was managed by the efficient and discreet Juliette Drouet

In spite of these tragedies Victor Hugo published in 1865 a volume of light verse entitled *Les Chansons des rues et des bois*. It was a charming, attractive title and it made an effective contrast to Hugo's recent poetic works, to *Les Châtiments*, for example, a stirring and appropriate term, but one for stern souls, to *La Légende des siècles*, intellectually intriguing, but hardly restful. How different *Les Chansons des rues et des bois*! what a vision of graceful simplicity is conjured up by those words! what verdure and music and carefree lightness!

Perhaps the very tragedies we have mentioned account in part for the volume, the poet felt the need of relaxation, hard though it was to achieve. In any case, the opening poem tells us how he forcibly led Pegasus into a meadow. This great *cheval de gloire*, accustomed to the stormy skies, was loath to enter an enclosure, however blossoming and idyllic it might be. Yet in spite of fiery resistance he is pastured in that lovely corner of nature

Où l'aube, qui vient s'y poser,
Fait naître l'églogue attendrie
Entre le rire et le baiser

where the poet, freed from his dizzy flights into the realms of history and speculation (as in *La Légende des siècles*) takes

delight in the song of birds, in the budding of trees, and in the seductive smiles of maidens full of springtime restlessness

Leonard Merrick's *Conrad in Quest of his Youth* comes to mind as one reads the pages of *Les Chansons des rues et des bois*. Conrad's great discovery was "that a man is young as often as he falls in love" That is not perhaps the declared thesis of Hugo's poems Indeed, Hugo presented them not as present experiences but as recollections of things past and of things dreamed "Reality," he wrote in the preface, "is modified in this book by everything which in man goes beyond the real This book is created to a large extent out of dreams, to some extent out of memory." Nevertheless, these poems demonstrate again and again that an eye for a flashing petticoat or the contour of a firm, round bosom is not limited by either mathematics or nature to the years of our youth

For that Victor Hugo was berated by hostile critics After "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" he had been called "Jocrisse à Pathmos" Now the charge of "Géronte à Paphos" was hurled at him. It was all very well for Alfred de Musset, a young man, to write the *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* Had the *Chansons des rues et des bois* also appeared in 1830 no hue and cry would presumably have been raised against them. In other words, for these critics — and I refer above all to Veillot and Biré — what matters apparently is not so much the merit of the poems as the age and morality of the author

As a matter of fact, while there is some sensuality in these songs, there is little, if any, indecency, and there is a great deal of beauty Some of them were written in May and June of 1859 on the island of Sark where Hugo had gone to rest after the arduous labors of *La Légende des siècles*, and they reflect the verdant beauty of that charming isle There he cer-

* Jocrisse, as most of my readers doubtless know, is the ninny of the old French farce, and Pathmos the island where St John composed the Book of Revelations, Geronte, the glibble, ridiculous old man, and Paphos, a city famous for its temple to Venus Astarte

tainly composed "A Rosita," "Les Trop Heureux," "De la femme au ciel," "L'Église," and "Clôture," five poems which in themselves illustrate the range of tone and inspiration to be found in the whole volume. Back in Guernsey some twenty more were penned in scarcely more than two months. We cannot speak of them all. Particularly pleasing are: "Mon vers, s'il faut te le redire," "Oh! les charmants oiseaux joyeux," and "Dizain de femmes," this last poem being written in seven-syllable lines, a rhythm that Hugo had not used for a long time.

"Choses écrites à Créteil" provoked, even in Victor Hugo's immediate entourage, keen discussion

Sachez qu'hier, de ma lucarne,
J'ai vu, j'ai couvert de clins d'yeux
Une fille qui dans la Marne
Lavait des torchons radieux

The *torchons radieux* (dazzling dishcloths) of this opening stanza was the subject of contention. Conservatives held that a dishcloth was hardly a fitting poetical subject. Nor could it be dazzling or radiant. Asseline tells us that at Guernsey they did not weary of discussing the question.⁶ Later on Hugo declared that he had merely described something he had seen many years before when he was about seventeen years old.⁷

One poem of the *Chansons des rues et des bois* stands out both for its fame and the special circumstances of its composition. "Saison des semailles," known to almost every school-boy, was first conceived in the poet's mind in September 1843 as he traveled on the road between La Roche and Rochefort in southwestern France. If that date be correct, the poem obviously owes nothing to Millet's famous painting first exhibited in 1850. On the other hand, the glorification of the farmer sowing his field is not remote from the eulogy of the plowman

⁶ Asseline, *Victor Hugo intime* (1885)

⁷ Ollendorff edition, p. 465

to be found in Lamartine's *Jocelyn* and George Sand's *La Mare au diable*. These texts may well have influenced Hugo. To say that does not detract in any way from the beauty of the poem the descriptive qualities and significant symbolism of which are universally admired. Leading up to a magnificent last line — *Le geste auguste du semeur* — the poem gives the same dignity and meaning to the peasant's life and labor that we find in the pages of Lamartine and Sand. Does Hugo's thought go farther, as M. Levaillant suggests, to embrace in this symbol the sower of ideas? That interpretation would surely not be incompatible with what we know of the poet's philosophy. Indeed, later on, in *Napoléon-le-Petit*, as M. Levaillant states, Hugo represents the political thinker as a "mysterious worker, whom one sees in the evening twilight striding in the furrows and casting into space, with an imperial gesture, the seeds and grains, the future harvest, the wealth of the coming summer, bread and life."

The theme of field and forest is predominant in the volume. But what of the streets? The truth is that they are largely missing. The sidewalks of Paris are not even to be found in the section entitled "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" which includes a reaffirmation of some of Hugo's important ideas. "Depuis six mille ans" is an eloquent expression of his pacifism, "L'Ascension humaine," a tranquil statement of his belief in progress, "Le Grand Siècle," a satire of the so-called great age with its periwigged sun-king. But these ideas are not placed in an urban setting. The nearest Hugo comes to evoking the streets of Paris is in "Jour de fête aux environs de Paris." The title of the volume is as deceptive as it is charming.

Were the *Chansons des rues et des bois* meant, as M. Levaillant thinks, to compete with the octosyllabic *Émaux et camées* of Théophile Gautier, Hugo's old friend? I am inclined to doubt it. Thirteen years had elapsed since the publication of Gautier's volume. It seems a belated rivalry. Then, too, more than a third of Hugo's poems are written, not in octosyllabic,

but in seven-syllable lines. But a more important obstacle to M. Levassant's opinion lies in the lyricism of the volume. A few poems, like "Saison des semailles" and "La Méridienne du lion," are plastic enough to justify the comparison with Gautier, though the former contains a strong lyric undertone and the latter is more reminiscent of Leconte de Lisle's work than of the *Émaux et camées*. The large majority treat lyric themes in lyric fashion, avoiding, to be sure, the extremely personal note of ultra-romanticism, yet rejecting also that objectivity and restraint, that excessive reliance on the plastic arts which are the chief characteristics of Théophile Gautier's highly chiseled poems.

Les Chansons des rues et des bois are not, of course, on the level of *Les Contemplations* and *La Légende des siècles*. Except for the opening and closing poems where Hugo seizes on the ancient myth of Pegasus, "transforming it anew," Swinburne says, "as if by fire," and except for a few poems like "Saison des semailles" and "L'Ascension humaine" where the author strikes a graver note, the volume is definitely in the category of light poetry. That accounts for the jests and quips which the poet has introduced into some of the poems and for which he has been harshly censured even by friendly critics. The collection nevertheless reveals, to quote Swinburne once again, a "miraculous dexterity of touch," a "dazzling mastery of meter," and an "infinite fertility in variations on the same air of frolic and thoughtful fancy."

CHAPTER XV

TWO SYMBOLIC NOVELS

Les Travailleurs de la mer, un
poème plutôt qu'un roman, un
poème en prose, vaste et puissant,
comme cet océan qu'il chante

— J CLARETTE

I. *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, 1866

VICTOR HUGO, in spite of all appearances, was a landlubber. The author of "Oceano Nox" and "Les Pauvres Gens," who had introduced into French poetry the theme of the sea, the illustrious exile of the Channel Islands surrounded for nearly two decades by the sound and spectacle of the surging waves, never undertook a long ocean voyage. The sea undoubtedly fascinated him — from the shore. The storms that swept in from the mighty Atlantic stimulated his responsive imagination. But, except to cross to the continent or to England, he never ventured on deep water. Not for him those *courses lointaines* which he had evoked (only to suggest a catastrophic end) in "Oceano Nox." When he traveled it was on land. Belgium and the Rhineland, the Alps and the Pyrenees were the landscapes that lured him away from his fireside. What is more, fond though he was of melodrama, he was not attracted to the novel of maritime journey and adventure. The voyages of Cook and Bougainville, the *Voyage à l'île de France* of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, the story of the *Bounty* so popular in our own day, such narratives offered admirable material for a talent like his. There were travel books in the library of Hauteville House which Hugo doubtless read. Yet, apart from a few details, he failed to exploit them.

Nevertheless, his new novel, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, deals with the sea. But it does so in a special way. It is a sea-story closely anchored to the land. Much of the narrative occurs in the little Guernsey port of Saint-Sampson. Its most exciting action takes place on the Dover Rocks in the midst of salt water, to be sure, but only fifteen miles from shore. For all this, the sea dominates the book with its devastating power and awful magnificence.

The manuscript, originally entitled *Gilliat le malin*, was begun on June 4, 1864, interrupted on August 3 by Hugo's vacation to the Continent, resumed on December 4, and completed by the end of April 1865.¹ The task absorbed nearly seven months. Yet Hugo was in no hurry to see the book in print. On May 15 he wrote to Albert Lacroix, who had reaped a fortune on *Les Misérables* and was eager for new harvests:

I hesitate to publish anything this year. I shall have two works completed, the novel and the *Chansons des rues et des bois*. But I should like to start at once on 93, and those two publications would require in correspondence and proof-reading five or six months of my time. That frightens me. I have only a few years ahead of me, and several important books to compose or to finish.

But the following summer, during his annual vacation, he stopped to see Lacroix in Brussels and was unable to resist his publisher's eloquence and enthusiasm. A contract was drawn up which Hugo signed. On October 30 he returned to Guernsey, got the manuscript ready, and sent it in.

One knotty problem was the cause of some discussion. Hugo had written an introductory chapter entitled "L'Archipel de la Manche." Eighty-eight pages long, it was packed with information and contained a warm tribute to the people of the Channel Islands. It doubtless helped to create the atmosphere of the novel, but it delayed the action far beyond the patience of the average reader. Hugo himself realized the dangers and proposed that this preliminary chapter be omitted in the first

¹ Ollendorff edition, p. 504.

edition. But he urged that it be included in the second and also be published separately for free distribution to every purchaser of the first edition who might later ask for it. Lacroix considered the chapter quite unnecessary and was only too glad to publish the book without it. The novel appeared on March 12, 1866. During the first three days four thousand copies were sold.

The sources of *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, still insufficiently studied, are both bookish and personal. Hugo consulted not only the encyclopedia of Lachatre (for the names of fish and maritime plants) and Métivier's *Glossaire* (for the dialect of Guernsey), but also such technical books as Prosper Meller's *Notice sur les courants atmosphériques*, Zurcher & Margolée's *Les Tempêtes*, and the *Essai sur la topographie de l'île de Jersey* by Robion de la Tréhonnais. He also dipped into the *Histoire détaillée des Iles de Jersey et de Guernesey* by Le Rouge, and he probably read some of the travel books in his library. Personal memories, too, contributed more than one detail. In 1859 during his vacation to the neighboring island of Sark² he saw a couple of sailors scale a cliff without other aid than a mere rope. The incident went into his notebook and reappeared, somewhat modified, in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. At Sark he visited the caves and grottoes near the port of Gosselin, there he saw for the first time an octopus which he did not fail to remember and to include in his novel. A few days later at Sark he witnessed from Cape Dicart the approach of a storm. He described it in his notebook and later added a line to the effect that the page had helped him to describe the tempest in the second part of *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. This same visit also provided Hugo with a dramatic scene which he sketched and to which he added the following comment:

A man slipped between these rocks. Caught in the narrow part and unable to climb up, forced to await the tide which comes and fills this crevice. A terrible death.

² See the "Excursion à Sark" in the second volume of Hugo's *Voyages*.

Though the circumstances in the novel are different, this note of 1859 probably suggested to Hugo the essential idea for the hero's suicide.

Les Travailleurs de la mer contains a melodramatic plot and characters as uninteresting as any that the poet had ever conceived. In *Les Misérables* Hugo had come close to reality and had achieved greatness. In less than four years he fell back into the weaknesses of his earlier days. The story opens — in the first edition — with a Christmas-morning scene. Snow had fallen, a rare event in the Channel Islands, and the road which skirts the sea from St. Peter's Port to Valle is completely white. Déruchette, a beautiful young girl, the ward of an old sea captain by the name of Mess Lethierry, is walking along this road. Not far behind her is a young man, roughly clad, a workman or a sailor. On a sudden impulse the girl turns about, sees that she is not alone, bends over, and writes something with her finger in the snow. A few moments later the young man beholds his name, Gilliatt, marked out on the white surface. From that moment Gilliatt, a humble fisherman and a solitary, misjudged, and isolated soul, is hopelessly in love with Déruchette.

Mess Lethierry had almost been ruined by a former partner called Rantaine. But Lethierry is an inventive and enterprising man. As the book gets under way, we see him re-establishing his fortune by means of a steamboat, *La Durande*, that he has put into service between Guernsey and the mainland port of Saint-Malo, the first steamboat to appear in those waters. Unfortunately, Lethierry has entrusted the command of his ship to Sieur Clubin who turns out to be even more crooked than Rantaine. Clubin wrecks the *Durande* in the hope of escaping with Lethierry's fortune which he has secretly recovered from Rantaine. Poetic justice thwarts these plans, for Clubin unwittingly drives the ship on the Dover Rocks instead of the less dangerous Hunois. Then when Clubin, seeking to escape, dives into the water, he is caught by an octopus and killed.

Meanwhile, Lethierry, informed of the wreck, promises his niece in marriage to the man who salvages the *Durande*. Here is Gilliatt's opportunity which he seizes without delay. Alone, he proceeds to the Dover Rocks where for three months he undertakes an epic struggle against the sea, against the wind and the tempest, against hunger and thirst. He even has to fight the octopus which had disposed of Clubin. But he miraculously accomplishes his mission, that of removing the steam engine from the shattered hull of the *Durande*, transferring it to his own boat, recovering even the money stolen by Clubin, and returning in tatters and exhaustion but in triumph to the little port of Saint-Sampson. There, alas! he comes upon an unexpected scene. Ebenezer Caudray, the Protestant pastor, has chosen this very night to declare his love to Déruchette and to ask her to marry him. Déruchette confesses her own love and agrees. The next day Gilliatt wins a moral victory over himself as great as his material victory over the elements. He urges Déruchette to disregard her uncle's command to marry him and to wed Ebenezer instead. He even helps them to achieve their desire. Then, going out to the rock called Gild-Holm-Ur, he lets the incoming tide envelop him as he watches the *Cashmere* carry the newly married couple to England. The suicide is more romantic than realistic, but it makes a poetically effective ending for the book.

None of these characters seems very real, and least of all the most important one, Gilliatt. Such extreme romanticism in an unlettered and primitive man is hardly probable. His exploits are still less credible. They are epic feats, and, in an epic poem within the conventional form and presentation of the epic, would doubtless be acceptable enough. But in a novel with any pretensions to realism, they are not. When all due allowance is made for the driving force of human passion, Gilliatt's achievements still seem to the reader to remain in the realm of the impossible. Nor is the general action made credible by the accumulation of coincidences which Hugo, with his customary

weakness, could not help piling up. That the pastor should, for example, pick the very night of Gilliatt's return to propose marriage to Déruchette is one of those coincidences which are perfectly possible, which sometimes occur in real life, but which in literature are extremely difficult to make convincing.

Les Travailleurs de la mer was not penned, like *Les Misérables*, as a work of combat. "This book," Hugo wrote to Paul Meurice, "is not a *livre de combat*, it is written, not for the present moment, but for posterity (excuse this bit of pride) That is its weakness and its strength." The little preface to the novel defines more clearly Hugo's intention

Religion, society, nature: such are the three struggles of man. .
A triple fatality (*ananké*) weighs upon us: the fatality of dogmas, the fatality of laws, the fatality of things. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the author denounced the first, in *Les Misérables*, he pointed to the second, in this book, he indicates the third.

To these three fatalities which envelop man is mingled the internal fatality, the supreme *ananké*, the human heart.

But the value of *Les Travailleurs de la mer* does not lie where Hugo hoped. It is neither in the action nor in the characters. If posterity is interested in the book, it is not because the fortunes of Mess Lethierry seem important or the love of Gilliatt significant and moving. It is very difficult for us today to understand how Émile Zola could have thought the story "simple and heart-rending," how all of his being could have been "violently shaken by the reading of these strange, strong pages." For the modern reader the value of *Les Travailleurs de la mer* is exclusively in the masterpieces of description which it abundantly contains: not, of course, the highly technical ones comprehensible only to a marine architect, but the genuinely artistic descriptions in which Hugo achieves singularly beautiful effects of light and color. M. Berret has already called attention to the evocation of the Dover grotto. The passage is more extraordinary than M. Berret's brief paragraph suggests, for it unites two tendencies of the poet: his capacity for

almost apocalyptic visions and his mastery of color and design. "This cave," he writes, "was shaped like the inside of an enormous and splendid skull, the vault was the cranium, and the arch was the mouth, the eye sockets were lacking." Then the artist is struck by the shades and tones of color filtered into this watery cave:

The light, traversing this compact mass of vitreous sea-water, turned green, like a ray of starlight from Aldebaran, and the pool seen in this light looked like a liquid emerald. A tint of aquamarine of marvelous delicacy softly pervaded the entire cave.

The death's-head conception is not forgotten, but suggested anew in the following sentence: "The roof, with its *cerebral lobes* and countless ramifications, like fibres of nerves, gave out a tender reflection of chrysoprase." Then comes a beautiful passage which depicts the movement of the water and with it a delicate play of light and color:

The rippling shades reflected on the roof incessantly broke apart and came together again, enlarging and contracting their golden scales in a mysterious, intricate dance. They created an impression of something weird and spectral. The mind wondered what prey or what expectation rendered so joyful this magnificent network of living fire.

To complete this picture, Hugo painted in the long, fine vegetation hanging from the ceiling of the cave.

From the projections of the vault and the angles of the rock hung lengths of delicate fibrous plants, bathing their roots probably through the granite in some pool above, and distilling from their silky tips, one by one, a pearly drop. These pearls fell in the water now and then with a gentle splash.

Then, recalling the notion of death introduced at the beginning, he concludes: "The effect of this scene was indescribable. Nothing more beautiful or more mournful could be imagined. It was a wondrous palace, in which Death sat smiling and content." Among all of Hugo's beautiful descriptions, this —

which needs, of course, to be read in the original French to be fully appreciated — is surely one of the most striking.

Yet the following chapter, "Ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on y entrevoit," contains beauties equally as great. A semiaquatic plant with its blossoms resembling sapphires when covered by the water, the rock of this cavern delicately sculptured by the waves, a natural altar perceptible at the farthest end, are some of the things depicted by the poet with extraordinary brilliance and virtuosity. Hugo reveals in these two chapters something of that visionary quality³ which Rimbaud was soon to declare essential to the poet. But while Hugo's imagination soars and brings him a vision of things surprising to men of lesser sensitivity, he remains attached to a concept of form and design close enough to the normal so that he never slips into incoherence or obscurity. His pictures may be amazingly different from what we are used to, they may be macabre, sometimes even revolting, they are never formless or incomprehensible. And they are frequently of sublime beauty.

Some of the descriptions in the novel are melodramatic. When they share in the action, they tend, naturally enough, to take on the essential quality of that action. Thus the account of Gilliatt's fight with the octopus, which has become an anthology piece, cannot be anything but theatrical. Somewhat similarly, the passage describing the storm which breaks over the Dover Rocks and almost wrecks the accomplishments and the hopes of Gilliatt is melodramatic for all its magnificence. It happens also to be ennobled by the central theme of the book. man's struggle against nature; in this case, against the sea and storm.

There is then, as Edmond Biré said long ago, a chef d'œuvre contained, almost hidden, within the pages of *The Toilers of the Sea*. It lies in the poet's vision of the wind and the waves, in his revelation of that submarine beauty so little known to

³ Another good example, even more sensational perhaps, is to be found in the chapter entitled "Examen local préalable." See the paragraph beginning "La double façade intérieure de l'écueil était hideuse."

most of his readers. It was, in short, in the "poème de la mer infusé d'astres et lactescent." Far better than Biré's, these words of Arthur Rimbaud indicate the essential beauty and interest of *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. He was not speaking of Hugo's novel when he wrote them, but they apply to a work which may well have influenced the precocious author of *Bateau ivre*.

II. *L'Homme qui rit*, 1869

Victor Hugo's multitudinous activities continued throughout his exile. In the year following the publication of *The Toilers of the Sea*, a great exposition was held in Paris. Hugo could not attend it without violating his vow not to return to France till liberty was restored, but he prepared for a *Paris-Guide* issued by his friend Louis Ulbach in connection with the Exposition, an introduction in which he paid tribute to the city he loved so well, and in which he once again set forth his dream of a confederation of Europe. At this time the government removed its interdiction of the poet's plays, and *Hernani* was revived with tremendous success. *Ruy Blas*, on the other hand, suffered a different fate. It was under rehearsal at the Odéon when the publication of Victor Hugo's poem, "Mentana," caused its suppression.

This poem, originally entitled "La Voix de Guernesey," was inspired by Garibaldi's defeat at Mentana on November 4, 1867, a defeat for which troops of Napoleon III were partly responsible. Hugo's wrath is consequently turned more against the Emperor than against the Pope. Not that Pius IX gets off very easily. Far from it. But of Napoleon III the poet writes.

Le crime est commencé Qui l'a commis? ce pape?
Non. Ce roi? non. Le glaive à leur bras faible échappe
Qui donc est le coupable alors? Lui. L'homme obscur
Celui qui s'embusqua derrière notre mur,
Le fils du Sinon grec et du Judas biblique,
Celui qui, souriant, guetta la République,
Son serment sur le front, son poignard à la main

This, in the good old style of *Les Châtiments*, was too much for the imperial government, and the performance of *Ruy Blas* was forbidden, though *Hernani* was allowed to complete its run.

Mme Hugo was in Paris in 1867 and attended the revival of *Hernani* in her husband's place. She apparently tried at this time to bring about a reconciliation between Victor and Sainte-Beuve. Her effort came to naught; there was too much ill feeling between the two men, as well as political differences, for Sainte-Beuve had long since rallied to the Empire. The following summer Mme Hugo went to visit her son Charles in Brussels. While there she was stricken with apoplexy, and on August 27, 1868, she died. It happened that her husband was present during her brief illness, for he had recently crossed from Guernsey in the first stage of the annual journey he was accustomed to take on the Continent. There had been a family reunion in Brussels, so that Mme Hugo was attended by her husband and son. As she wanted to be buried beside Léopoldine at Villequier, Charles Hugo, the always faithful Auguste Vacquerie, and Paul Meurice accompanied her body to France. Victor Hugo went as far as the frontier. A month later he returned to Guernsey.

During the last two years he had been at work on a new novel⁴ that reverted in some respects to the tastes of his youth. In *Les Misérables* and *Les Travailleurs de la mer* there were no giants, no misshapen dwarfs, no hunchbacks; in a word, except for the octopus with which Gillhatt fights, no monsters. But the author of *Han d'Islande*, *Bug Jargal*, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and *Le Roi s'amuse* was far from permanently cured of his taste for them. His new work, *L'Homme qui rit* (published in four volumes from April 19 to May 8, 1869), while purporting to give a view of England and of the English aristocracy at the beginning of the eighteenth century, is nonetheless the

⁴ He began it July 21, 1866 in Brussels and finished it there on August 23, 1868, two days before his wife's stroke.

story of a monster. Only this time the monster is not an accident of nature, but is deliberately fashioned by man.

Fernain, the son of Lord Clancharlie, an exiled republican peer, was sold by order of King James II (desirous of seizing Clancharlie's domain) to a group of international traders in children known as the Comprachicos.⁵ These scoundrels not only bought the two-year-old infant, but mutilated him, performing on their helpless victim the operation described as *Bucca fissa usque ad aures*, which fixes an eternal laugh upon the countenance. Frightened by new laws against their ilk, the Comprachicos abandoned the child, now ten years old, one snowy January night of 1690 on the English coast near Portland. Their intention was to let the youngster die from hunger and exposure while they sailed off to safety on the Continent. Caught by a terrible storm in which their vessel is doomed to destruction, the Comprachicos confess their crime in a document placed inside a bottle and cast into the sea. Meanwhile the boy struggles against the elements. As he trudges doggedly on, he stumbles some hours later over a body nearly buried in the snow. A quick investigation reveals a dead woman and wrapped up inside her cloak a blind baby girl still alive. Picking up the baby, the boy plods on till he finally comes to the edge of a town and finds shelter in the quarters of a strolling mountebank who goes by the name of Ursus and who has a tame wolf responding to the appellation of "Homo." Ursus teaches the boy and girl, whom he has respectively named Gwynplaine and Dea, his own trade, and they appear together in the various fairs of England. Gwynplaine is known as the *Man who Laughs*, and has become remarkably successful. So successful, indeed, that Ursus decides to seek their fortune in London. There, after an impressive initial success, extraordinary events occur. An English noblewoman, the Duchess Josiane, half sister of the Queen, is seized by a kind of perverted lascivious desire for Gwynplaine and seeks to make

⁵ *Comprachicos*, a Spanish term meaning "buyers of children."

him her lover. At this point the bottle containing the truth about Gwynplaine's birth is washed ashore where it falls into the hands of Barkilphedro, one of the Queen's servants. The Queen, therefore, decides to restore to Lord Clancharlie (i.e., Gwynplaine) all his property and aristocratic rights and to impose him as husband on the Duchess. So the young mountebank suddenly finds himself elevated to the peerage and admitted to a session of the House of Lords. There he tries to make a speech, a liberal, humanitarian speech, but the noble lords are convulsed with laughter, unable to take seriously this man with the eternal grin. Gwynplaine, profoundly hurt, returns to his former comrades only to discover that Dea, whom he loves, is mortally ill. She dies in his arms, and the Man who Laughs throws himself into the sea.

Such, in brief, is the extraordinary tale unfolded by Victor Hugo, and in vain do we tell ourselves that the extraordinary can and sometimes does happen in real life, no such reflection enhances the credibility of the novel. It won little success at the time of its publication and even less in the opinion of posterity.

A good many years ago M. Berret analyzed the sources of this tale. He showed that the idea of the hero's mutilation came from the article "Dénasatus" in Du Cange's famous *Glossarium*, that the organization of buyers and mutilators of children was developed from the association in Hugo's mind of the Spanish *Trabuayres*⁶ (or bandits) and the Gypsies, and details of child deformations picked up in the *Dictionnaire de la conversation* (1834), that other elements in the book were suggested by Beeverell's *Les Délices de la Grande-Bretagne et de l'Irlande* (1707), Chamberlayne's *État présent d'Angleterre* (1688), and John Debrett's *Peerage* (1826), and Ledru-Rollin's *Décadence de l'Angleterre* (1850). But M. Berret also showed that Victor Hugo's imagination played at will over

⁶ The *Trabuayres* (or *Trabucaires*) were bandits who got their name from a weapon they carried, called *trabuco*. Hugo compared them with the Gitanos.

these sources without concern for minute accuracy, seeking only the creation of a picture that would be moving and powerful.

Ridiculous as the plot may seem, unreal as the characters are, inaccurate as the picture of England undoubtedly is, the book contains nevertheless some very great beauties, some very moving and powerful passages. In the early part of the narrative, Gwynplaine, alone in the nocturnal blizzard, comes upon a gallows from which hangs a smuggler's body coated with tar. A perfectly extraordinary description follows, similar in method to Hugo's amazing picture of Quasimodo ringing the bells of Notre-Dame. Here, as in the text of 1831, the fantastic dominates. But first Hugo depicts the swaying corpse with the realism of a Villon or a Baudelaire:

The face was the color of earth, slugs, wandering over it, had left ribbon-like silvery traces. The skull, cracked and fractured, gaped like a rotten fruit. The teeth were still human, for they retained a laugh. The remains of a cry seemed to linger in the open mouth. A few hairs of what had been a beard clung to the cheeks. The bowed head seemed expectant.

Then Hugo's imagination goes into a new development. A group of ravens swoop down on the gallows. Pushed by the wind, the body sways, and the birds take flight, only to return and attack the corpse in a fantastic struggle.

The dead man appeared to be endowed with a monstrous vitality. Gusts of wind lifted him up as though intending to carry him away. He seemed to be struggling and to be making efforts to escape, but his iron collar held him fast. The birds adapted themselves to all his movements, retreating, then striking again, scared but desperate. The corpse, moved by every gust, seemed to tremble and start, to experience fits of rage, it turned and twisted, rose and fell, driving back the scattered swarm. At times it was covered by talons and wings, then it was free. The horde had disappeared, only to return in fury. The birds seemed frenzied. The doorways of hell must give passage to similar swarms. Clawings, peckings, croakings, shreds of flesh that was no longer flesh, creakings of the gibbet,

shudderings of the skeleton, rattlings of the chain, sounds of the storm, tumult, — what conflict more fearful? A specter warring with devils. A combat of another world.

Before this terrifying vision, this mad spectacle, the ten-year-old Gwynplaine takes fright "He fled," says Hugo, "leaving this torment behind him in the night."

Other notable passages in the book do not have the apocalyptic and fantastic quality which characterizes this gallows scene. The description of the great storm which sweeps the Comprachicos and their vessel, the *Matutina*, to the bottom of the sea is more conventional. While powerful, it does not surpass the admirable evocations of *The Tostlers of the Sea*. The sympathetic picture of Lord Clancharlie (Gwynplaine's father) is carefully drawn, the analogy between the exiled peer and the exiled poet being obvious in almost every paragraph. Hugo, naturally attracted to this high-principled Scot, originally thought of calling his novel *Lord Clancharlie* and making the lord its central figure. While he rejected this idea in favor of the son's pathetic destiny, the old lord still receives a splendid tribute. The speech of Gwynplaine before the House of Lords and the tumultuous scene accompanying it have also been recognized by all critics as making one of the important chapters of the book. Here, too, the personality of the author intervenes, Hugo's profound humanitarianism, his pity for the underprivileged, are recorded in the hero's passionate lines. Doubtless the turbulent scenes in the French Assembly when the poet broke in 1850 with the conservative majority, were also present in his mind as he composed this section of the novel. Finally, the analysis of Gwynplaine's reaction to this experience is a masterpiece of comprehension, expressed in prose that borders on poetry. We refer particularly to the paragraph beginning *O tragique énigme humaine* (Chapter II of Book IX) which sums up so beautifully the pitiful lot of this victim of human malice.

L'Homme qui rit is not a good historical novel. Granted that

the central plot and characters of a historical novel may be fictitious, still the fictitious characters must be convincing, the genuinely historical ones must be accurately drawn, the background must be made to appear authentic. On all these counts the verdict goes against Hugo. Scholars from Miss Maclean to Mr. J. H. Thomas, have shown in detail what a simple reading of the text automatically reveals.

But Hugo never really intended that *L'Homme qui rit* should be a historical novel. He protested in a letter to his publisher, Lacroix, who had announced the book as a "roman historique" that he had never written one. The key to a proper comprehension of this work is to be found in Gwynplaine's speech when he declares "I am a symbol," and explains

I am the incarnation of All. I represent humanity as its masters have made it. Mankind is mutilated. That which has been done to me, has been done to all. In the lower classes, right, justice, truth, reason, intelligence have been deformed, as eyes, nostrils, and ears have been deformed in me, their hearts have been made a sink of passion and pain, like mine, and their features, like mine, have been hidden in a mask of joy.

He represents the people and, in a wider sense, man. He is not, in the usual fashion, a convincing human being in a realistic novel. But he is not meant to be. Like Dea, who represents innocence and goodness, and the Duchess, who embodies vice, Gwynplaine is the incarnation of human suffering. As the central, titular figure he is the most heavily endowed with symbolic meaning. An example of man's inhumanity to man, Gwynplaine stands as a dramatic monument of Victor Hugo's constant pity for the weak and of his profound sympathy for all those who suffer and are heavy laden. That is clearly the meaning and import of the book.

CHAPTER XVI

EXILE'S RETURN

L'Année terrible, 1872

This is my own, my native land!
— W SCOTT

THE events leading up to the Franco-Prussian war caused Victor Hugo and his sons the gravest anxiety. Remembering the great success of *L'Événement*, they had decided in 1869 to found a newspaper, *Le Rappel*, in which they had energetically combated the domestic policies of Napoleon III. A particularly brilliant campaign was waged against the Emperor's farcical plebiscite of May 8, 1870. Only a few weeks later came the foreign problem. When Gramont, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared on July 6 that the presence of a Hohenzollern on the Spanish throne would be inimical to the "interests and honor of France," *Le Rappel* denounced the folly of the government's course. And when war finally came Victor Hugo did not hesitate to dub it bluntly a "war of caprice."

Nevertheless, he was a Frenchman and could hardly hope for anything but a French victory. In mid-August, deeply concerned by the turn of events, he left Guernsey for Brussels, ready to re-enter France if the situation warranted. From there he watched as closely as he could the progress of the campaign. The defeat at Sedan and the revolution in Paris opened the way for his return. On September 5, accompanied by several friends including Jules Claretie and by his son Charles, Victor Hugo ended his long exile.

The journey from Belgium to Paris was a profoundly moving one. At Landrecies Hugo had his first glimpse of French

soldiers, worn and haggard. Tears came to the poet's eyes, and leaning out the window, he cried out: *Vive la France! vive l'armée! vive la Patrie!* At Tergnier he had his first meal in France after nineteen long years, a simple repast of bread, cheese, and wine. Then, returning to the train, they rolled on to Paris. There a tremendous ovation awaited him. For years Hugo had represented opposition to the Empire, he had become a living symbol of the Republic. Now the Empire had fallen and the Republic, at least in Paris, was proclaimed. An immense crowd had gathered to meet this man, to pay tribute to his fidelity and courage.

What an ovation [wrote Jules Claretie] was offered him by this tumultuous and revolutionary people of Paris, a people ready for great things, more joyful over its reconquered liberty than frightened by the cannon rumbling at its ramparts. We shall always see the carriage making its way down the rue Lafayette, the poet standing erect, with tears in his eyes, uplifted by the throng.

Escorted in this fashion by the people of Paris, Hugo went to the home of Paul Meurice, at 5 avenue Frochot, where a fraternal hearth was placed at his disposal.

The hour was grave, with France deeply invaded and Paris threatened. What was to be Victor Hugo's rôle? At the age of sixty-eight he could hardly bear arms. A poet, he was destined to function as a poet. But he began, four days later, by issuing an appeal to the Germans. He reminded them that the war had been declared by the Empire and that the young Republic was innocent. He called for a cessation of hostilities on those grounds. A futile and naive proceeding, it must be admitted. But for hostile critics, like Pierre de Lacretelle, to interpret this as an egotistic request not to attack a city "in which he found himself, an unarmed old man with his two grandchildren," is a wholly unjustifiable accusation.¹ Let us not forget that at this

¹ P. de Lacretelle, *Vie politique de Victor Hugo* (Paris, Hachette, 1928), p. 218. I have discussed Lacretelle's interpretation of Hugo's conduct at this time at greater length in an article entitled "Exile's Return," *Romanic Review* (December 1939).

date Victor Hugo could still have left Paris and that he chose to stay!

When this appeal to the Germans failed, Hugo issued a proclamation on September 17, to the French. It called for a *levée en masse* and harked back to the days of the First Republic. The policy was scarcely realistic. But the document is superbly eloquent and does credit to the poet's patriotism, to his heart, if not to his head.

By September 19 the investment of Paris was complete, and the historic siege had begun. Throughout the four terrible months that followed, Victor Hugo contributed, as well as an old man could, to the common cause. He authorized the first French edition of *Les Châtiments* and donated a portion of the profits to the fund being raised for new cannon. He refused to play politics, and urged upon everybody union before the enemy. He continued to live with Paul Meurice, but he hired a *salon* in the Pavillon de Rohan (in the rue de Rivoli) where he received his guests, and this *salon* became a veritable center. Many came there to see him: Daumier, Gambetta (before he managed to escape by balloon), Edmond de Goncourt, Gautier, Schœlcher, Louis Blanc, numerous others. Always the poet advocated a united front. "I urge every one to be calm and united," he wrote just before the capitulation. Edmond de Goncourt records in his diary two calls he paid Hugo during the siege. The younger man found the old master a striking figure with his "mutinous white locks, resembling the prophets of Michelangelo," and was impressed by his simplicity, modesty, and good nature.²

That good nature was also revealed in the way he endured the hardships of the siege. Perhaps occasionally he received a favor which an unknown man could not have hoped for. But on the whole, he shared the common lot, eating not only horse-meat, which was frequently in a dubious condition, but even less pleasant alternatives. Almost every day the menu fur-

² Goncourt, *Journal*, IV, 114, 116

nished the poet with opportunities for Rabelaisian wit as well as for stoical resignation

Paris capitulated on the twenty-eighth of January. On February 8, 1871 elections were held for a National Assembly to negotiate peace. The results revealed a deep division of opinion between the capital and the provinces. Paris rewarded exiles and conspicuous republicans. The leading candidates elected were Louis Blanc, Victor Hugo, Garibaldi, and Edgar Quinet, all republicans and all partisans of a policy of further resistance to Germany. Of forty-three representatives chosen by Paris only six were partisans of peace. The provinces, on the other hand, returned a majority favorable to immediate peace and, what is more, hostile to the Republic.

This is not the place, however, to retrace in detail the political events of the following weeks and months. As was to be expected from his previous stands, Victor Hugo spoke at Bordeaux (where the Assembly met) against ratification of the treaty of Frankfort. He apparently believed quite sincerely that all was not necessarily lost, that further military resistance was possible. He was also of the firm opinion that the treaty of Frankfort would be disastrous to any hope of permanent peace in Europe. "There will be henceforth in Europe two nations to be feared: one because it will be victorious, the other because it will be vanquished." Peace in Europe under such conditions would be an idle dream. No more judicious analysis of the state of Europe from 1871 to 1914 could have been made. Even Thiers recognized its validity and interjected: "It is true." But Hugo quickly abandoned himself completely to the notion of revenge which the emotion of the moment might well have excused had he not added to it a program of conquest. France would some day not only recover Alsace-Lorraine but would also conquer the whole left bank of the Rhine. Then — after such an act of violence — she would extend the hand of friendship to Germany.

No more frontiers! The Rhine for all! Let us be the same republic,

the United States of Europe, . . . let there be universal peace! And now let us shake hands, for we have rendered service to each other, you have delivered us from our emperor, and we deliver you from yours

Even Hugo's friends must admit that this is the speech of a poet in which republican principles of justice have been sacrificed to a poetic vision or an oratorical effect. An Alsatian deputy immediately arose and repudiated the suggestion of conquest: "We do not want to do to others what we do not wish done to ourselves." It is worth noting that Hugo loyally included the text of this protest in the publication in 1875 of *Actes et paroles*.

Hugo was finding himself more and more uncomfortable in this Assembly so completely dominated by conservative deputies. The last straw came on March 8 when a dramatic incident occurred. Garibaldi had been elected a representative from Paris in gratitude for his services rendered during the war. Already on February 13 this distinguished republican had felt the ire of the monarchical majority. On that day he had been prevented from speaking — a wholly unnecessary insult even from a conservative point of view, for the Italian had just tendered his resignation as deputy in the belief that his foreign birth made it improper for him to accept. Now, nearly a month later, the conservatives quite needlessly insulted Garibaldi again. He had been elected from Algiers as well as from Paris. The committee on credentials, instead of simply reporting that his previous resignation doubtless applied in this case also, sought to have his election declared null and void. At this point Hugo intervened to protest and in the midst of his short speech tactlessly referred to Garibaldi as "the only unbeaten general" of the war. These words provoked violent reaction from the Right, and Hugo, snatching up a pen, wrote on the spot a letter of resignation.

He was moved to resign by more than the personal irritation of the moment. Thoroughly disgusted with the Assembly, he

had favored from the first moments at Bordeaux the idea of protest resignations. In meetings of the Left (the *Gauche radicale*) he had pleaded for collective resignation. Unable to persuade his colleagues to resign in a body, he undoubtedly seized this occasion to dramatize before public opinion the intolerant policy of the reactionary majority.

On March 11, the Assembly adjourned to meet again at Versailles. Hugo remained in Bordeaux, somewhat uncertain of his course, when the sudden death of his son Charles on March 13 once again brought tragedy into his personal life. The text of *Choses vues* testifies to the poet's natural grief and to his complete absorption in this private crisis. He accompanied his son's body to Paris where on the eighteenth Charles was buried in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. The father's only consolation was in the spontaneous tribute he received, for the funeral cortege was augmented by hundreds of Parisians who in this way expressed their sympathy and at the same time transformed the sad event into a solemn demonstration of their support of the republican cause which Hugo symbolized.

On the twentieth he left for Brussels where his grandchildren's interests required his presence. Meanwhile, there was danger of civil strife in his native land. On the very day of Charles's funeral the historic insurrection had broken out. For a time, thanks to suggestions made by the mayors of Paris, it looked as if peace might be achieved. But the Thiers government was not in favor of compromise, and matters went from bad to worse. On April 2 the troops of Versailles (the seat of Thiers's government) attacked the city, and the war was on.

The unhappy conflict was probably a source of acute embarrassment to the republican poet. Privately, he placed responsibility for the outbreak of civil war squarely on the shoulders of Thiers and his government, and declared that the Commune was a "good thing badly done"; publicly, he did little more than to deplore fighting between Frenchmen. But a man in Hugo's position could ill afford the luxury of such

tepid neutrality. The great Radical — for that was his reputation — the erstwhile leader of the Left in the last days of the Second Republic, the author of *Les Misérables*, was expected to take a more forthright stand. Whatever may be said of the Commune (and its faults were many), it had a genuinely "patriotic, republican, and proletarian character" which deserved some public recognition from Victor Hugo.⁸

Before and after the conflict ended, Hugo did protest against reprisals, whether they came from the Left or from the Right. What is more, he did not hesitate, though living in Brussels, to denounce the Belgian government's action in closing the frontier to Communards fleeing from the savagery of Versailles, and in the same document he offered asylum in his own dwelling to any fugitive. This humanitarian gesture provoked an incredible uproar in Belgium and France. Excited conservatives completely lost their heads. In Brussels Hugo was the object of a hostile manifestation during the night of May 26. Some young men gathered before his house, hooted, and threw stones. (Hugo reported the event in one of the poems of *L'Année terrible*.) Then on May 30 he was ordered by the Belgian government to leave the country.

He took refuge in the Duchy of Luxembourg at Vianden. From there he watched the progress of the repression and from there he witnessed his defeat in the elections of 1871.

The fall of the year found him back in Paris where, shortly after, a second electoral defeat overwhelmed him (in January 1872). The successful revival of *Ruy Blas* in February and the warm reception given to *L'Année terrible* in April brought him some consolation. But the illness of his son, François-Victor, attacked by tuberculosis, caused him new grief. Personal tragedy and political disillusionment combined to turn his thoughts toward Guernsey, that peaceful isle which had

⁸ This is a very complex question which I have discussed in much greater detail in the article already mentioned, "Evile's Return," *Romanic Review* (Dec 1939)

harbored him so long. In the summer of 1872 he left Paris to return to the island where he had spent so many years as an exile from his native land

The irony of that return must have been apparent to Hugo himself. For nineteen years he had gazed longingly from the Channel Islands toward France. For nineteen years he had hoped for political changes that would enable him to re-enter the country of his birth. Even though his exile after 1859 was a voluntary one, it was nonetheless hard to bear. When the events of September 4 overthrew the Emperor, Hugo rushed to the fulfillment of his hope. But to what did he return? Not to peace, but to war. Not victory, but defeat. Not to political coöperation in a common cause, but to political strife. Not to harmony, but to discord. Even the popular adulation which was his in the autumn of 1870 turned to criticism and indifference within a few short months. The Republic for which he fought was menaced by the machinations of the same old monarchical cliques with which the poet had broken in 1850 to 1851. Disillusionment could be carried no further. Add to all this the personal tragedies he endured: the death of Charles, the insanity of his daughter, the illness of François. To Hugo's seventy years these burdens were heavy indeed. To Guernsey then he turned, seeking there calmer scenes and hoping for a respite from the blows of fate.

One's sympathies are inevitably aroused by this vision of Hugo's flight. But one must not forget that in considerable measure he was responsible for his political failure. He had not, to be sure, wavered in his attachment to the Republic. Nor had he failed to identify its most subtle enemies. This much he had learned and not forgotten from the experience of 1848 to 1851. But the same fatal tendency which had caused him to condemn the National Workshops in 1848 led him into indecision, confusion, paralysis over the issue of the Commune in 1871. What were the errors and mistakes of the Communards compared to the central fact that all the most

vicious enemies of political freedom and progress were lined up against them? That was what Hugo in his dislike of violence and extreme measures forgot. And that was doubtless a leading reason why he was so quickly ignored, if not forgotten, by the majority of the people of Paris.

A knowledge of some of the events just related is necessary to a proper understanding of *L'Année terrible*, that somber and brilliant book, composed, for the most part, under the lash of events, or as Hugo says

sous la dictée
De l'heure qui se dresse et fuit épouvantée

While some of the poems were written later, all are classified, not according to their date of composition, but in their proper historical sequence. "Sedan," for example, penned in July 1871, is placed at the beginning under the month of August 1870, and "Le Deuil," composed on June 3, 1871, is logically situated in March, the month of Charles's death.

The tone of *L'Année terrible* is generally grave and patriotic. A lighter note creeps into such a poem as "Lettre à une femme" which speaks good-humoredly of the hardships of the siege:

Nous mangeons du cheval, du rat, de l'ours, de l'âne
Paris est si bien pris, cerné, muré, noué,
Gardé, que notre ventre est l'arche de Noé,

Sur nos tables sans nappe, où la faim nous attend,
Une pomme de terre arrachée à sa crypte
Est reine, et les oignons sont dieux comme en Égypte

or in a text like "A petite Jeanne" where the poet's affection for his grandchild is revealed in the tenderest lines. But, on the whole, the inspiration is akin to that of *Les Châtiments* and *La Légende des siècles*. The theme is nobler, of course, than in *Les Châtiments*, for it is a theme of French resistance, suffering, and valor. Beside the semihumorous lines quoted from

"Lettre à une femme" one finds, for example, a well-merited tribute to the women of Paris:

Elles acceptent tout, les femmes de Paris,
Leur âtre éteint, leurs pieds par le verglas meurtris,
Au seuil noir des bouchers les attentes nocturnes,
La neige et l'ouragan vidant leurs froides urnes,
La famine, l'horreur, le combat, sans rien voir
Que la grande patrie et que le grand devoir

Through such conduct patriotism rises above the status of a word to a living reality

Hugo's treatment mounts frequently to epic heights as he pictures the heroic struggle Here and there, to be sure, satire in the old vein bursts forth In "Sedan" the poet cannot refrain from uttering bitter words on the folly of the fallen emperor In other poems he reveals his disillusionment concerning Germany The reader will remember that thirty years before, Victor Hugo viewing the country of Goethe with all too romantic an eye had favored a Franco-Prussian *rapprochement* The Rhineland tourist now gives way to the besieged Parisian German guns pounding the city speak a language of complete brutality The Frenchman's ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity face the Teutonic realities of infantry, cavalry, and artillery And Victor Hugo, cured for the moment of any pro-Germanism, declares "to those who speak again of fraternity":

Quand nous serons vainqueurs, nous verrons Montrons-leur,
Jusque-là, le dédain qui sied à la douleur
L'œil âprement baissé convient à la défaite
Libre, on était apôtre, esclave, on est prophète
Nous sommes garrottés! Plus de nations sœurs!

Aimer les allemands? Cela viendra, le jour
Où par droit de victoire on aura droit d'amour

Je ne puis que saigner tant que la France pleure.
Ne me parlez donc pas de concorde à cette heure,
Une fraternité bégayée à demi
Et trop tôt, fait hausser l'épaule à l'ennemi;
Et l'offre de donner aux rancunes relâche
Qui demain sera digne, aujourd'hui serait lâche

The dignity of such lines was more than a personal reaction; it registered admirably the sentiment of the nation. In 1940 Marshal Pétain and M Laval would have done well to imitate it.

The national sentiment was also echoed in the somber but beautiful poem, "Nos morts," composed in December 1870 after the failure of the battle of Champigny which, it had been hoped, would break the siege. The plateau of Avron was strewn with corpses, and Hugo paints them in grim and eloquent lines:

Ils gisent dans le champ terrible et solitaire
Leur sang fait une mare affreuse sur la terre,
Les vautours monstrueux fouillent leur ventre ouvert,
Leurs corps farouches, froids, épars sur le pré vert,
Effroyables, tordus, noirs, ont toutes les formes
Que le tonnerre donne aux foudroyés énormes,

On voit partout sur eux l'affreux coup du boulet,
La balafre du sabre et le trou de la lance,
Le vaste vent glacé souffle sur ce silence,
Ils sont nus et sanglants sous le ciel pluvieux

O morts pour mon pays, je suis votre envieux

The complete poem contains but twenty-four lines. It is a model of that precise, plastic style which Hugo used less than the exuberant, expansive manner, but which he adopted with admirable effect when he chose.

The attitude of foreign statesmen toward the plight of France seemed inexplicable to Victor Hugo as it must have to most Frenchmen.

Personne pour toi Tous sont d'accord Celui-ci
 Nommé Gladstone, dit à tes bourreaux. merci!
 Cet autre, nommé Grant, te conspue, et cet autre,
 Nommé Bancroft, t'outrage

To these men and to his compatriots Hugo cried out:

Ah! je voudrais,
 Je voudrais n'être pas français pour pouvoir dire
 Que je te choisis, France, et que, dans ton martyre,
 Je te proclame, toi que ronge le vautour,
 Ma patrie et ma gloire et mon unique anioir!

Today, in 1944, the descendants of Gladstone and Grant have not committed the mistake of 1870 Germany has not been allowed to win the war But if Frenchmen cannot echo the first lines of this poem, "A la France," they can still repeat with emotion the concluding ones

Conservative critics tend to approve the first two-thirds of this volume dealing with the great events of August to March. They admire the ardor, the verve, the glowing patriotism of many of the poems The remaining section, from April to July, is another story Far from appreciating the fact that Hugo deliberately refrained from supporting the Commune, limiting himself to mere deprecation of the civil war, they are furious because he failed to denounce the Commune They even declare that in these poems (April to July) Hugo speaks as an *homme de parti*. As a matter of fact, republicans of progressive mold might well reproach Hugo for excessive neutrality Both conservative and liberal critics can doubtless agree that this section of the volume is the weakest Great poetry, like much great art, is more likely to emerge from an ardent conviction than from an ability to see both sides of a question. Hugo's neutrality, his lack of enthusiasm for the Commune, robs these poems of that fire and cogency which distinguished so many of *Les Châtiments*

CHAPTER XVII

"QUATREVINGT-TREIZE," 1874

Ne flattons pas les catastrophes,
la révolution a été toujours utile,
parfois horrible
— *Reliquat de Quatrevingt-treize*

DURING the nineteen years of Victor Hugo's exile, literature had evolved in France. In poetry, the Parnassians had arisen, and we have seen in *William Shakespeare* that Victor Hugo would have none of their doctrine. In the novel, too, important innovations had been made. Realism had come to maturity and naturalism had made its début, and we have seen that in *Les Misérables* Hugo thought he was writing a realistic novel. He abandoned that tendency in *Les Travailleurs de la mer* and *L'Homme qui rit*, returning to the symbolism of which he was so fond. On the question of naturalism he remained silent. If naturalism consisted merely in introducing the lowest classes of society, he could claim to have done that in *Les Misérables*. But, of course, naturalism was much more, as Zola's work, influenced by Claude Bernard,¹ was beginning to show. To this development Victor Hugo was apparently indifferent. Later on, after the publication of *L'Assommoir*, he was very critical of Zola's doctrine, maintaining that certain pictures "should not be made," certain nudities should not be exposed. Meanwhile he returned to the historical novel and published *Quatrevingt-treize*.²

The civil war of 1871 not only inspired a portion of *L'Année*

¹ Claude Bernard published, as is well known, his *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* in 1865.

² I have adopted Hugo's spelling of this title. He does not separate "Quatre-vingt" according to the modern French custom.

terrible, but also served to strengthen Victor Hugo's impression of the horror of all civil strife, and it undoubtedly revived his interest in a work dealing with 1793. As early as 1857 he had composed a poem entitled "La Révolution" which still lay unpublished in his files. When he was writing *La Légende des siècles* he thought of including "the giants of 93," the Montagnards and the Vendéens. The only product of that impulse was the poem "Jean Chouan" published in the second series. In 1863 he announced to his publisher that he was "on the threshold of a very large work" dealing with Ninety-three. But *Les Chansons des rues et des bois*, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, and *L'Homme qui rit* absorbed all his energies. Yet he had by no means abandoned the project to which his family history — "Mon père, vieux soldat, ma mère, Vendéenne" — as well as his personal inclinations led him. In the preface to *L'Homme qui rit* he wrote:

The true title of this book might well be *Aristocracy*. Another book which will follow could be called *Monarchy*. And these two books, if the author is permitted to finish this work, will precede and lead to another which will have the title of *Ninety-Three*.

At long last, more than a year after the end of the Commune, back on the island of Guernsey, Hugo really got to work on his new novel. "I begin this book today, December 16, 1872. I am at Hauteville House," he wrote in a careful manuscript note. The work was destined to be finished on June 9, 1873.

A great deal of reading in preparation for *Quatrevingt-treize* had been done by the poet during the preceding years. Balzac's *Chouans* did not influence him in any direct way, but Hugo must at least have been willing, perhaps eager, to compete with his illustrious predecessor. The principal sources of Hugo's tale, however, have been readily discovered by Professor Berret, the editors of the Ollendorff edition, and by Miss Florence Page. Hugo possessed in his Guernsey library about forty different works dealing with the Revolutionary period. The ones

he consulted most extensively were the *Mémoires de Joseph de Puisaye* (1803) which furnished him the character of Lantenac, the *Lettres sur l'origine de la Chouannerie et sur les Chouans du Bas-Maine* by J. Duchemin-Descepeaux (published in 1825-1827) which gave him further details on Puisaye (i.e., Lantenac) as well as episodes of the Vendean uprising, the two volumes of Louis Blanc's *Révolution française* (1866), Lamartine's *Histoire des Girondins*, Hamel's *Histoire de Robespierre* (1865), and Sébastien Mercier's *Paris pendant la Révolution* (republished in 1862), the principal source of the chapter entitled "Les Rues de Paris dans ce temps-là."

As usual, what Hugo sought in these volumes was the colorful incident, the characteristic detail, the picturesque item. In the *Mémoires de Joseph Puisaye*, for example, there was a page recounting Puisaye's flight in an old rowboat. Hugo marked it "Important à lire" and, as a consequence, Lantenac makes his escape from the *Claymore* in a small boat which only the skill of the sailor Halmalo brings safely to land. Again in these same *Mémoires* there was a narrative of a meeting between Puisaye and a beggar who might have betrayed the nobleman but who preferred to succor him instead. This is the source of Lantenac's meeting with the beggar Tellmarch in the fourth book of *Quatrevingt-treize*.

Reminiscences from the poet's past as well as literary sources also contributed to the construction of the novel. More than thirty years before, in June 1836, Victor Hugo and Juliette Drouet had taken a trip to Brittany.³ They had spent some time at Fougères, Juliette's birthplace, where they visited the famous sights and buildings of the town, including of course the famous château de Fougères which dated from medieval times and which figured in Balzac's work. They also explored the surrounding country, taking walks in the near-by forest and visiting the neighboring villages. Memories of this excursion account for more than one detail of *Quatrevingt-treize*. *La*

³ See L. Barthou, *Un voyage romantique en 1836* (Paris, Floury)

Tourgue,⁴ for example — that medieval tower where the republicans besiege Lantenac and his men — never existed in reality in the forest of Fougères, but it did exist elsewhere. It is none other, as M. Étienne Aubrée has demonstrated, than the Tour Mélusine of the Château de Fougères transported by Hugo's imagination to the forest. The site on which the novelist located the tower is the *ravin de l'Artour* which he undoubtedly visited while tramping through the woods with his mistress. The episode related in the chapter, "Une méprise," is also connected with this romantic journey of 1836. In those pages a group of peasants are lying in wait for the guillotine and its escort which they propose to attack and destroy. After the attack is successfully made, the peasants learn that the escort was carrying a long ladder. Thinking that it is to be used against the besieged royalists they burn it. M. Aubrée has discovered that there still exists in the vicinity of La Villebœuf (not far from Fougères) a legend of an attack on a revolutionary guillotine and its escort. In all probability this local story gave Hugo the idea for his chapter, though he modified it somewhat according to the needs of his tale.

Like *Les Misérables*, *Quatrevingt-treize* is a novel of action, a novel of character, and a novel of ideas. It is, moreover, in some respects, a good historical novel, certainly the best that Hugo ever wrote. It suffers, of course, from the usual Hugolian weaknesses, exaggerated melodrama, grandiloquent dialogue, and violent antithesis. One of the presiding conceptions of the composition was the conversation near the end between Gauvain, condemned to die the next morning on the guillotine, and Cimourdain, the inflexible judge who was sending him to that fate. The *Reliquat* contains the following note:

Supper of the executioner and the victim, old friends. Cordial. The man to be guillotined justifies the one who sends him to his death.

⁴ La Tourgue is the peasant abbreviation of La Tour-Gauvain as Hugo explains in the chapter "Une Bastille de province."

Night passed in discussing philosophy and nature. The guillotine in the morning. 93.

The narrative is clearly arranged to lead up to this necessary conclusion which is, at the same time, a typical Hugolian antithesis.

Just as the earlier novels of Victor Hugo contained one or more anthology pieces — the quicksand episode in *Les Misérables*, the fight with the octopus in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, for example — so *Quatrevingt-treize* contains a description that has become justly famous. the breaking loose from its moorings of a heavy cannon on board the corvette *Claymore*, and its dramatic capture Here, as elsewhere, Hugo's fertile imagination is stimulated. The cannon becomes for him a living thing, a kind of monster.

A cannon which breaks its hawser [he writes] becomes instantly a sort of supernatural beast It is a machine which turns into a monster This mass rolls about on its wheels, moves like a billiard ball, slides with the roll of the boat, lurches with the pitch, goes, comes, stops, seems to meditate, resumes its race, crosses the ship from one end to the other like an arrow, whirls around, slips away, escapes, rears, knocks, gouges, kills, exterminates . . . It is the entrance of matter into liberty.

Such is a part of the dramatic vision which Hugo evokes, and the reader, by now familiar with the author's methods, can easily imagine to what lengths he carries this conception. The cannon is finally halted in its mad course by the unknown passenger whom Hugo had previously introduced and who turns out to be none other than the Marquis de Lantenac, the chief of the Vendée Thus the episode is linked to the main action of the book and even contributes to the characterization of one of the principal actors

Descriptions such as this tend, of course, to slow down the central narrative, and the plot of *Quatrevingt-treize*, like that of all Hugo's novels, could have been enclosed within a much smaller space. Edmond Biré has said that Mérimée would

have made a little masterpiece in twenty or thirty pages out of the several hundred which Hugo consumed. That is doubtless true, but Hugo was not Mérimée and his work is not necessarily inferior because it is more extensive. The poetry, lyric or epic, which Hugo introduces into all his novels compensates for the scattering of the various elements of the plot. Even Biré is forced to admit that when he says, "Poem or novel, *Quatrevingt-treize* is, from the literary point of view, a work full of good qualities and of faults, but the former dominate."

The opening scene of the book is in the bois de la Saudraie, in Vendée. There the republican battalion of the Bonnet Rouge comes upon a poor woman, Michelle Flécharde, whose husband has been killed in the war. With her are her three children, Georgette, René-Jean, and Gros-Alain. On the motion of sergeant Radoub the battalion adopts the widow and children. Hugo then transports us to the sea where the corvette *Claymore* is carrying her illustrious passenger to France. After the cannon scene is over, the *Claymore* is caught in battle with ships of the Republic and the Marquis de Lantenac barely succeeds in making his way to shore in the boat mentioned earlier in this chapter. There he proceeds to organize the royalist revolt against the Republic and comes into conflict with the government forces commanded by Gauvain who happens to be — a typical Hugolian coincidence — the grandnephew of the Marquis. There is bitter hostility between the two men, each of whom has sworn to exterminate the other. Present also on the republican side is Cimourdain, sent by Robespierre, Danton, and Marat to keep an eye on things. He is a delegate with full powers, or, as we should say today, a political commissar representing the civil authority which in the last analysis commands the military.

After the Vendéens have been beaten at Dol, the scene shifts to the old fortress of La Tourgue located on the property of Lantenac. There the Marquis takes refuge with his handful of remaining men. They have with them the three children of

Michelle Flécharde who was badly wounded earlier and who is being cared for by the beggar Tellmarch. Lantenac offers to release the children if he and his men are allowed to depart in safety. Gauvain and Cimourdain refuse. The attack begins and is carried on with the utmost fury. At the last highly critical moment Lantenac and the few remaining Whites escape by a secret passage, leaving the children in the tower where they run the danger of being burned to death. At that precise juncture Michelle Flécharde reappears on the scene and beholds the terrible fate of her children. Lantenac, unexpectedly moved by her grief, returns to the tower, saves the children, and is arrested by Cimourdain. But Gauvain, profoundly touched by Lantenac's nobility, frees his uncle and takes his place. Cimourdain implacably condemns the young man to the guillotine. After a night in which the two Republicans discuss the Revolution and the future of society, the execution is carried out. At the moment when Gauvain's head falls into the basket, Cimourdain puts a bullet through his own.

As devoid of sexual passion as any novel of Walter Scott's, *Quatrevingt-treize* resorts to other themes for melodramatic effect. Civil war is melodrama and though the novel's action is partly spoiled by unlikely coincidences and by violent antitheses, the ferocity of civil conflict emerges with all its poignancy and horror from these pages. And the narrative, elementary though it may be, holds the reader's attention to the end.

I ventured to assert in a previous paragraph that *Quatrevingt-treize* is a good historical novel. In spite of all the book's weaknesses, that assertion can be supported. In our revolutionary twentieth century it is easier to see the novel's good points than during the relatively quiet eighties and early nineties when the work was most harshly judged. By that time a new generation of readers had forgotten the violence of the civil war of 1871 which had doubtless caused the first readers of 1874 to receive *Quatrevingt-treize* with considerable enthusiasm.

The book's chief merit lies, perhaps, in the creation of the three great symbolic characters, Lantenac, Gauvain, and Cismourdain. Through them the novelist imparts, as M Berret says, "a faithful impression of the spirit of monarchy and the spirit of revolution." Lantenac is a striking representative not only of the old aristocracy with its loyalty to King and Church, with its pride of caste, with its conception of honor, but also of the ruthless reactionary in a time of civil war. For Lantenac slaughters his adversaries without compunction or restraint, putting prisoners to death in mass executions which are the all too frequent episodes of many bitterly fought civil wars. While they did not occur in the American Civil War which nevertheless divided families, pitting brother against brother and sometimes father against son, the Commune of 1871 and the Spanish Civil War of 1936 beheld mass executions which shocked neutral opinion everywhere. In spite of this ruthless ferocity, Hugo seems to admire Lantenac. He has certainly made him in many ways an attractive figure, audacious, highly courageous, faithful to his ideals, and in the final episode generous and self-sacrificing. For many readers he is the hero of the book.

But the true hero would seem to be rather the young revolutionary Gauvain. He bears the name of Hugo's mistress, for Juliette Drouet was born Julienne Gauvain, and, oddly enough, her father and her uncle were not republicans but *chouans*. Hugo has made his hero an aristocrat by birth but a republican by conviction. He is clearly the character whom the author admires the most, for his republicanism is tempered by tolerance, his love of liberty by clemency. As audacious, as courageous as his uncle, he is in addition pure, idealistic, and forward-looking. Even his betrayal of the Republic at the end of the book is made not only understandable but almost admirable, for it is the product of his clemency, a trait glorified by Victor Hugo from the time of *Hernani*. He does not war on women and children. He would be incapable of ordering the mass executions which Lantenac commands without a quiver.

He is the type of sincere Revolutionary who nevertheless refuses to be fanatical, a patriot but still a man. "Mais enfin je suis homme," he might well say, as Corneille's Curiace did to his incredible Roman brother-in-law.

No such weaknesses are discernible in that implacable Revolutionary, Cimourdain. He is as fanatical — and, therefore, cruel — as Corneille's Horace, as inflexible as any twentieth-century fascist or communist rigidly following the party line. A former priest, Cimourdain has carried into the revolutionary movement the clerical spirit of submission and discipline. His purity, his unselfishness, his courage, his ability, his idealism are unquestioned. They are equaled only by his grim and unyielding resolution. His single weakness is his love for Gauvain who had been his pupil in former years. This weakness, be it noted, is not revealed by any clemency toward Gauvain, but by Cimourdain's suicide.

In these characters Victor Hugo has caught and vitalized one of the important issues of any revolutionary movement or period. In our own day André Malraux has done something similar when he placed Garine and Tcheng-Dai face to face in *Les Conquérants*. Garine, the revolutionary man of action, Tcheng-Dai, the pacifist and contemplator. Again in *La Condition humaine* Malraux reveals an irreconcilable conflict in the scene between the Communist Kyo and the Gestapo-type policeman, Kong. In Victor Hugo's novel the opposition between Lantenac, on the one hand, and the republican chiefs, on the other, but above all the contrast between Gauvain and Cimourdain have the same kind of basic significance. For the twentieth-century reader who has witnessed the Russian revolution and the Spanish counter-revolution, Hugo's chapter entitled "Les Deux Pôles du vrai" is amazingly up to date. In that scene Cimourdain warns Gauvain against his fatal weakness.

"No false pity, Gauvain. Regicides are liberators. Fix your eyes on the tower of the Temple."

"The Temple tower! I should let the Dauphin out of it I do not make war on children."

Cimourdain's look became severe

"Gauvain, understand that we must make war on woman when her name is Marie-Antoinette, on an old man when his name is Pope Pius VI and on a child when his name is Louis Capet."

"But master, I am not a politician "

"Try not to be a dangerous man "

The fundamental conflict of policy is already apparent in these lines. But Cimourdain continues in more generalized fashion:

Yes, what characterizes this tremendous year is the absence of pity Why? Because it is the great revolutionary year This very year embodies the revolution The revolution has an enemy, the old order, and is without pity for it Revolution extirpates royalty in the king, aristocracy in the noble, despotism in the soldier, superstition in the priest, cruelty in the judge, in a word, everything that makes for tyranny in the tyrant . These fearful necessities are the very condition of success A surgeon resembles a butcher, a healer may appear as an executioner The revolution is consecrated to its fateful work It maims, but it saves

Has any novelist expressed more clearly, more explicitly the issue of moderation versus fanaticism? Malraux in the scenes we mentioned has put the conflicts in which he was interested more succinctly, but he has not seen any more clearly the issues involved It is high time that Victor Hugo's insight into one of the great problems of revolution be fully recognized.

Far more than in Balzac's *Chouans* which focuses attention almost exclusively on the local scene and on an absorbing tale of passion, the great Revolution in its entirety looms up in *Quatrevingt-treize* Under Hugo's guidance we walk in the streets of Paris where we see all the manifold changes wrought by recent events We meet the great figures, the giants of '93, Robespierre, Danton, and Marat We enter the hall of the Convention and behold its turbulent session Not the least remarkable section of *Quatrevingt-treize* is Hugo's picture and judgment of that assembly It had caused him to shudder some

thirty years before. Now he goes to the other extreme and calls the Convention "the culminating point of history." Yet he also sees that all the representatives of the Convention were not heroes. Beside brave and sincere men there were fools and cowards. "Nothing more ugly and more sublime. A pile of heroes and a herd of cowards" Again he says "Along with men of passion were mingled men of dreams" In the final analysis, however, Hugo maintains that the Convention performed a great work of civilization "At the same time that it unleashed revolution, this assembly produced civilization" Note, he adds, that the Convention abolished slavery and the slave-trade. It decreed free public instruction and organized a national school system It created conservatories and museums It instituted hospitals and recognized the right of the indigent to relief And it performed these tasks under the immense handicap of foreign and civil war "Nothing in history," concludes the poet, "is comparable to this group, at once senate and populace, conclave and crossroad, areopagus and public square, tribunal and accused."

Such is Victor Hugo's *Quatrevingt-treize* With all its defects it remains a picturesque and provocative book Dealing with a highly controversial subject it has given rise to judgments usually conditioned by the political opinions of the judges Conservatives denounce it. "From a political and social point of view," said Edmond Biré, "it is a detestable work" Progressives love it. "The author," wrote Camille Pelletan, "has grouped around the action the whole Revolution, and . . . he has brought to life with incomparable power its genius, its perils, its inflexible logic, its sublime enthusiasms" Does the truth necessarily lie somewhere between these extremes? Perhaps But the present writer confesses to a far greater degree of sympathy with the judgment of Pelletan than with that of the politically conservative critics

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRIUMPHS OF OLD AGE

. les fils de nos fils nous enchantent
— V. H

I. *L'Art d'être grand-père*, 1877

AFTER the death of Charles Hugo in 1871 and François-Victor in 1873 the great consolation of Victor Hugo's life was Charles's two children, Georges and Jeanne. When we recall that the poet's own babies had filled him nearly half a century earlier with paternal delight and poetic enthusiasm, it is obvious that as a grandfather Victor Hugo could not be anything but simply magnificent. Georges was born in the summer of 1868 and Jeanne in the autumn of the following year. They would have won the old man's heart in any event, but in their fatherless state they made a still more touching appeal to his emotions. One has only to read the notebook in which Hugo jotted down every few days observations and comments to realize what the children meant to him. On July 23, 1871 he writes: "Little Georges compared to what he was a year ago is prodigious. Two years ago, in August 1869, he had only two words: *guh!* and *tah!* . . . Today he says everything, and, one might almost add, he thinks everything. He is a handsome, strong, and charming child. His father all over again at the same age." After François-Victor's death, he writes on January 1, 1874: "At noon, Alice took me to see the children. They lunched with me. Presents. Toys. Childhood happiness. A gentle murmuring around a sad soul." In rural Vianden (in 1871) one of the poet's joys was to take the children for their daily airing. Later in Paris — where he returned in 1873 after finishing *Quatrevingt-treize* — there was the garden behind the house

at number 21 rue de Clichy. Frequently Hugo played there with his grandchildren. But often, too, he conducted them to the public gardens or the zoo

Hugo was now seventy-five years old. He had celebrated his birthday by publishing the second series of the *Légende des siècles*. Now he followed up that triumph with *L'Art d'être grand-père* which appeared on May 14, 1877 and, except for a few poems written long before 1868, was inspired by the two grandchildren. The large majority were penned in 1870, 1874, and 1875. Some of the texts, like "Georges et Jeanne" and "Jeanne endormie," are over-sentimental.¹ Many are charming and delightful. They have, too, a surprisingly wide range of subject and interest. There are little inconsequential anecdotes of the youngsters' activities like the well-known "Jeanne était au pain sec" with its amusing dénouement, or like the broken vase episode which Hugo recounts so entertainingly and imaginatively in "Le Pot cassé." There are also poems inspired by trips to the zoo, poems that combine simplicity and subtlety, childlike observation and philosophical reflection. The elephant can be simply a beast with "horns in its mouth" or it can evoke "Africa with its insuperable undulations." The spectacle of "an innocent child laughing before an infamous monster" is something, indeed, to ponder on.

C'est une émotion étrange pour mon âme
De voir l'enfant, encor dans les bras de la femme,
Fleur ignorant l'hiver, ange, ignorant Satan,
Secouant un hochet devant Léviathan,
Approcher doucement la nature terrible

This is an antithesis from which Hugo drew some extremely poetic effects

"L'Épopée du lion," one of the longer compositions of *L'Art d'être grand-père*, was less inspired by the roaring beasts of the Paris zoo than by a book entitled *De la création, essai sur*

¹ Four poems bear the title "Jeanne endormie," three of them being, indeed, terribly sentimental

l'origine et la progression des êtres,² by Boucher de Perthes. This author cited as an example of pity among animals the tale of a lion that carried off a child but then allowed the child's mother to take the infant back when she knelt before him. Boucher de Perthes quoted this case only to refute it, but Victor Hugo saw its narrative and symbolic possibilities. Hugo's lion steals the child of a king, devours the knight sent to rescue the boy, jeers at a holy hermit who tries moral suasion, scatters a company of soldiers under orders to deliver the lad, and is finally moved to pity by the boy's little sister who accomplishes what all the king's men were unable to achieve. If the poem had any other purpose than to entertain Georges and Jeanne, it was doubtless to show the triumph of innocence over brute force and possibly evil. But it is not necessary, I think, to take the poem too seriously. The best thing is to enjoy it as a kind of fairy-tale recounted with all the poetic ingenuity of which Hugo was capable.

His extraordinary talent for rendering all the most delicate phenomena of external nature is again revealed in more than one poem of this collection. "Choses du soir" is one of the best examples.

Le brouillard est froid, la bruyère est grise,
Les troupeaux de bœufs vont aux abreuvoirs,
La lune, sortant des nuages noirs,
Semble une clarté qui vient par surprise

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son bimou

Le voyageur marche et la lande est brune,
Une ombre est derrière, une ombre est devant,
Blancheur au couchant, lueur au levant,
Ici crépuscule, et là clair de lune.

The refrain belongs to what the French call *la poésie populaire* and what in English we label folk-poetry. The rest of the poem

² Published from 1838 to 1841.

is a simple and direct notation of sensory impressions through which the poet creates an atmosphere of tranquil beauty. Other illustrations of this same talent may be seen in "Ora, ama" and in the well-known poem, "La Mise en liberté."

The volume ends with five poems for Georges and Jeanne to read when they grow up. Hugo takes this means to bequeath to them some of his most important ideas: his faith in human progress and in the necessity of the constant search for truth, his belief in liberty, justice, and fraternity.

Je rêve l'équité, la vérité profonde,
L'amour qui veut, l'espoir qui luit, la foi qui fonde,
Et le peuple éclairé plutôt que châtié
Je rêve la douceur, la bonté, la pitié,
Et le vaste pardon

The old warrior in the cause of liberty and progress had frequently written more brilliant lines than these, but he had rarely composed nobler ones.

II

Life in the rue de Clichy was a combination of family and social pleasures. Charles's widow had married Edouard Lockroy, a French politician and a member of the Chamber of Deputies, so that Victor Hugo's days were not only enlivened by the presence of his grandchildren, but also by all sorts of literary and political contacts which his own talents, his own history, and the connections of Alice's husband made inevitable. Almost every evening Hugo received friends and admirers in the red drawing room which soon became famous

There [writes Gustave Rivet], senators and deputies, poets and painters, novelists and journalists, bring to *le Père* the tribute of their veneration and their applause. There he is, clad in whatever jacket he may have put on that day, informal and simple, laughing and chatting with all who come to see him, as if they were equals and comrades.⁸

⁸ G. Rivet, *Victor Hugo chez lui*

His renunciation of politics in 1872 had been dictated more by necessity than desire. But he who had played such a prominent part in the events of his century could not become indifferent to the problems of the Republic for which he had fought. The very subject matter of the novel into which he had plunged, *Quatrevingt-treize*, showed that his "escape" was halfhearted. The publication in 1875 and 1876 of *Actes et paroles* with prefaces and commentaries designed to show the consistency of his political evolution—and with even some emendations of the original text introduced for the same purpose—revealed his constant preoccupation with political controversy. Hugo obviously wanted to return to the arena.

That he deserved some tangible reward for his long opposition to the Empire and his fidelity to the Republic was recognized by many. Late in 1875 Georges Clemenceau took the lead in arranging for the poet's election to the Senate. The tumultuous Chamber of Deputies was not the place for his years and temperament. The upper house was more appropriate. On January 30, 1876 Hugo's election was completed and he took his seat.

For some time, animated by the spirit that inspired Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Victor Hugo had been urging a general amnesty for the defeated Communards. Now as a member of the Senate one of his first acts was to support an amnesty bill. But again, as of old, he found himself in a minority. In spite of his eloquence and the wisdom of such a proposal, only nine members joined with Hugo in favoring the project. Passions were still riding too high even five years after Thiers's triumph to permit the victors any indulgence toward the vanquished.

Apart from this speech on amnesty, the only important activity of Victor Hugo's senatorial career was his contribution to the great issue of prorogation in 1877. The circumstances will be clear to all those familiar with the history of the Third Republic. Marshal MacMahon was President, having been

elected as a "safe" man, a good Catholic and Legitimist. But new elections confronted him with a Chamber of Deputies dominated by Republicans. For a year or two he made an effort to get along with them, then on May 16, 1877 he broke with the parliamentary majority, forced the resignation of the ministry headed by Jules Simon, installed the Duc de Broglie as Prime Minister, and asked the Senate for its concurrence in prorogation of the Chamber, to be followed by new elections. It looked like a possible *coup d'État*, for there was no evidence that the republican majority in the Chamber had ceased to be representative of public opinion. Furthermore, with Europe upset by the Russo-Turkish war and with Bismarck on the watch to take advantage of any serious French weakness, the President was showing bad judgment all around.

Before one of the senatorial "bureaux," met to appoint a committee to study the President's request, Victor Hugo launched his first attack. He asked M. de Meaux, one of the members of De Broglie's cabinet, what MacMahon would do if new elections returned the same republican majority. Would the President bow to the will of the nation and resign along with his ministry, or not? It was a leading question. It put in pointed fashion and in an official setting the issue as stated by Gambetta who declared in a public speech outside of Parliament that MacMahon should either give in or give up (*se soumettre ou se démettre*). De Meaux, embarrassed, replied that only the President could answer such a question. He did not wish to be smoked out.

Hugo's second attack came on June 12, 1877 when he delivered before the Senate his speech on "La Dissolution." Here, too, he warned of a *coup d'État*. Comparing the past and the present, he said "I ask nothing better than to believe in loyalty, but I remember that we believed in it once before." He then called attention to the state of Europe and declared that it was not the moment to precipitate a national crisis. He perhaps irritated the Right by suggesting that their real purpose was

revolution (more properly counter-revolution) which would re-establish the throne and give new power to the Church. But it was, on the whole, a statesmanlike speech. If it was also, in one sense, a conservative speech, the whole Left shared that conservatism. It is, therefore, incorrect to see in Hugo's words, as does M. de Lacretelle, proof of Hugo's dislike of Radicalism. For Radicalism was not here the issue. The real issue was the stability of the Republic, and Hugo showed himself a good republican by voting in this case against prorogation which was nevertheless adopted by the conservative majority of the Senate.

The poet's third attack on MacMahon's policy was his publication on October 1, 1877 of the *Histoire d'un crime* (written twenty-six years before and now quickly revised) two weeks before the elections for the new Chamber. Only the first volume, to be sure, appeared on that date, the other being delayed till the following March. But the first volume had a tremendous success. One hundred thousand copies were sold within ten days.

The overwhelming Republican majority returned on October 14 was naturally not the product of Victor Hugo's personal campaign. His was only one voice among many that rallied the nation to the Republic. But it is pleasant to record that he had a share in the triumph. His beloved Republic, momentarily endangered, was now safe, for MacMahon was not prepared to resort to violence. The old Marshal clung to the *Élysée* another year, but when the Senate went republican and when a new quarrel between the Chief Executive and Parliament arose over the treatment of army officers, MacMahon gave up and resigned his office. Thus ended an episode in which Victor Hugo played a fairly conspicuous, if not important, rôle. His seventy-fifth year was no fireside existence.

III

As if to show that he feared no battle, Victor Hugo published on June 8, 1878 a highly controversial poem, *Le Pape*. It is linked with two events: the election in February 1878 of Pope Leo XIII and the celebration on May 30 of the hundredth anniversary of Voltaire's death. The first event had a double significance, it recalled the career of Pius IX who at the start of his papacy had led many, including Victor Hugo, into thinking him liberal, at the same time it revived the question of the relation of the papacy to the civil authority, because one of the first acts of the new Pope was to issue an encyclical which showed that however talented he might be, his position on the basic problem of Church and State was no better than his predecessor's had turned out to be. The second event, the tribute to Voltaire, is of importance because Victor Hugo was scheduled to play a prominent rôle in it, and was, therefore, led quite naturally to think again of the general problem of clericalism.

In these circumstances Hugo published his poem, an attack on the papacy as it is, a eulogy of the papacy as it might be. The poem is only partly Voltairean, for Hugo had too religious a nature to be the spiritual heir of Voltaire. The two writers are at one only in their anticlericalism. The eighteenth-century wit had none of the fervent mysticism that animated the author of "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre." In *Le Pape* Hugo relates a papal dream in which the representative of God on earth leaves the Vatican, clad in burlap, and journeys abroad through the world, preaching love and fraternity, and setting always an example of goodness and charity. At the end of the poem the Pope wakes up and exclaims "What a frightful dream I have just had!"

Fundamentally there is nothing new in Hugo's text. His dream pope resembles in character and attitude Bishop Myriel of *Les Misérables*. The poem is important only as an *œuvre*

de circonstance, merely as a commentary on events of the day. A new pope had been elected, so let us think about the papacy. Voltaire had been dead a hundred years. That, too, raises the question of clerical institutions and of churchmen

IV

This year, 1878, marked undoubtedly the apogee and turning-point of Victor Hugo's old age. Since 1870, at a time when most men are not only willing to retire but are physically or mentally unable to do anything else, the poet had continued his full and active career. At seventy-five he was still spending his mornings in writing and part of his afternoons in exercise. He no longer tramped on the Guernsey shore and bathed in the sea, but accompanied frequently by his faithful Juliette he still took a two-hour walk. At the end of the day he usually had guests for dinner followed by an evening's conversation. And at seventy-five he engaged in a political controversy of not inconsiderable proportions.

But in 1878 came an unmistakable warning. One evening toward the end of June, Hugo got into a discussion with his old friend Louis Blanc. The topic was Voltaire and Rousseau, and though the two friends had much in common they managed to differ quite violently on the subject. Their conversation became heated, so heated that Victor Hugo suffered a mild attack of apoplexy. The doctor, hastily summoned, ordered a complete rest. To obtain it, Victor Hugo returned to his island refuge.

He spent four lazy months there and then left Hauteville House forever. Back in Paris he moved to a quieter neighborhood, hiring a residence on the avenue d'Eylau (since called the avenue Victor Hugo). This he occupied with Mme Drouet. The Lockroys with the two children, Georges and Jeanne, lived in the house next door. Formerly, in the rue de Clichy, they had all been under the same roof. The new arrangement gave the old poet greater tranquillity.

From now on Victor Hugo composed practically nothing, even though during the next two or three years several volumes appeared in print. In every case they were texts written long before this and held by the poet in reserve. He had never destroyed anything he had written, he left that task, he said, to posterity.

In 1879 and 1880 he published three long poems: *La Pitié suprême*, *Religions et religion*, and *L'Ane*. Launched separately at first, they were soon united with *Le Pape*, and the four poems then appeared in a single volume. They are not major poems and do not need detailed analysis. *La Pitié suprême* was thought by some people to have been written for the purpose of helping obtain amnesty for the Communards. But the poem was composed in 1857 at the time Hugo was writing the "Petites Épopées" and could not have been inspired by the events of 1871. Its theme, moreover, is that tyrants, even tyrants, should be pardoned.

Oh! soyons bons surtout pour les cruels
Le méchant, c'est le cœur d'amertume rempli
Vous cherchez les souffrants, il est le véritable
Oh! le cri de cette âme est le plus véritable

This clearly has nothing to do with the Commune, it is merely Hugo's conception of clemency, pardon, and charity carried to an extreme conclusion. But it is possible that Hugo by publishing the poem in 1879 at a moment when the question of amnesty for the Communards was being discussed hoped indirectly to influence the debate and the decision. As the critic of *La Lanterne* said: "Victor Hugo, by begging for amnesty for the tyrants, has made the best plea for the insurgents."

Religions et religion tells us what we already knew, namely, that Victor Hugo had little use for churches, for religious organizations, for theologies, but that he was profoundly religious. The importance of the poem does not lie in its anticlericalism or in any revelation of doctrine. Its importance is rather to be

found in its date of publication. For in 1880 it came as an event in the widespread reaction against positivism and naturalism that was about to burst forth. Hugo's attack on such materialism was followed by that of Louis Pasteur who two years later declared in his *Discours de réception* at the French Academy that the mystery of the Infinite is a reality from which there is no escape. The great chemist, Marcelin Berthelot, replied in 1885 that "the world is today without mysteries," and brought down upon his head the thunder of Brunetière. Very probably Victor Hugo did not consciously inaugurate this great debate, but the fact remains that he was one of the first to protest against scientific determinism, and the reviewers were quick to see it. Said Charles Canivet in *Le Soleil*, May 17, 1880: "This book of Victor Hugo's is the most eloquent condemnation of the arrogance of science today." And the critic of *Le Constitutionnel*, May 6, 1880, was no less explicit: "He has broken a lance with the materialists who are numerous in the camp of which he is one of the leaders."

The conclusion of *Religions et religion* is, therefore, the most significant part of the poem, for in these lines Hugo declares once again his belief in the existence of God

Il est! . . .

Tout, les feux, les clartés, les cieux, l'immense aimant,
Les jours, les nuits, tout est le chiffre, il est la somme
Plénitude pour lui, c'est l'infini pour l'homme

Il est! il est! il est! sans fin, sans origine,
Sans éclipse, sans nuit, sans repos, sans sommeil

Renonce, ver de terre, à créer le soleil.

Begun in 1870, completed in 1872 save for a few final touches in 1880, *Religions et religion* is a final demonstration of that religious sentiment which had always been one of Hugo's essential characteristics.

The long poem *L'Ane*, which completes the tetralogy, needs

to be read in the light of Victor Hugo's general philosophy, for it was first composed in 1857, just after "*Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre*." It belongs to that period when, according to M. Viatte, Victor Hugo was flirting with the occult and was being influenced by the "*Illuminés*" of the century. But the central thought of the poem is common enough: man must recognize the mystery of the universe which defies rational analysis. He must be humble before this mystery, and humility will bring him peace. This humility, moreover, based on recognition of his imperfections, leads him to closer sympathy with children — whose reason is not yet developed — and with animals — whose reason is almost nonexistent. Children quite obviously partake of the universal mystery from which they have recently arrived, but so do animals, thinks Hugo, and they should be treated with sympathy, respect, and love.

If this be true, then an animal, poetically endowed with reason and set to the task of judging man, may be an effective instrument of satire. So La Fontaine understood when he wrote "*L'Homme et la couleuvre*." And such is Victor Hugo's intention here. The ass of his poem is no longer the humblest of man's servants, but an animal gifted with speech and reason which he uses to satirize human pedantry. Unfortunately, the poet chooses as the immediate recipient of the ass's arrows Immanuel Kant. Such a choice confuses the reader who admires the philosopher of Königsberg and who recalls that ordinarily the poet is on the side of the searchers for philosophical truth. Of course, a close examination of the text shows that Kant is merely the enforced auditor of the ass's satires which are directed not against true learning and philosophy, but against stupid erudition and tyrannical theologies. Brilliant as some of the poem is, it suffers from a poor choice of protagonists.

V

On February 27, 1881 Victor Hugo entered his eightieth year, and received from the citizens of Paris an ovation such as is rarely given to living men. Not even Voltaire, on his return to Paris in 1778, received a greater tribute. For Victor Hugo the city of Paris decorated the Avenue d'Eylau with flags and flowers. A laurel tree was planted in the poet's garden by the Société des gens de lettres. A large deputation of children appeared to do him honor. Then came the Conseil Municipal to salute the aged poet, who fittingly replied

I salute Paris, the great city

I salute her, not in my name, for I am nothing, but in the name of all that lives, reasons, thinks, loves, and hopes here below

This speech was followed by a long, impressive parade which lasted most of the afternoon and which included Freemasons and Labor Unions as well as school children and the Société des gens de lettres. It was as much a political manifestation as a tribute to an individual, for Hugo still symbolized the Republic, and the paraders did not fail to add *Vive la République* to their cry of *Vive Victor Hugo* as they passed in front of the poet's house.

A few weeks later Victor Hugo published *Les Quatre Vents de l'esprit*, a volume of poems written over a long period of time, from 1843 to 1875, and representative of the four types of poetry — satiric, dramatic, lyric, and epic — which had flowed so freely from his pen. Hugo had been ready to publish it in 1870, but the great events of that year and the next delayed publication. Then other works claimed his attention. Eleven years passed before the volume was put on sale. Meanwhile a few new pieces were added.

All critics, while admiring such poems as "La Révolution" (in the *livre épique*) and "Proscrit, regarde les roses" (in the *livre lyrique*) agree that the most original and interesting com-

positions in these *Quatre Vents de l'esprit* are "Les Deux Trouvailles de Gallus" — "Margarita" and "Esca." Begun in 1865 and completed in 1869, these two texts were suggested by a phrase of the Latin fabulist, Phedrus: *Gallus escam, quærens margaritam reperit* ⁴ Moreover, they were forerunners of the *Théâtre en liberté* which appeared in 1886 after the poet's death. "Margarita" and "Esca" have rather close affinities with Musset's comedies, for they are a combination of fancy, caprice, laughter, and tears. One should hasten to add that the tears are limited to the second, for "Margarita" is entirely free of any tragedy, it is a light, charming little comedy in which good humor and poetic fancy triumph over realism. In both poems, Gallus is Duke, cynical and disillusioned, but singularly goodhearted. He came to power by usurpation, but he has abolished the gallows and opened schools. He says:

Quant à moi, je règne de mon mieux
J'ai brisé les vieux jugs et les vieilles bricoles,
Supprimé la potence, ouvert beaucoup d'écoles,
Diminué l'impôt, semé le vrai, dissous
L'erreur, et je n'ai pas de remords pour deux sous

He is a very likable fellow. Bored with office he seeks diversion in love. Not romantic love, but an episode more suited to his disillusioned and sophisticated nature. "I am looking," he says, "for that exquisite thing a *drôlesse*." He wants a virgin, not any ordinary virgin, but a "démon vierge," an Agnès with the potentialities of a Lais. Needless to say, he does not find one. In the first play he finds Margarita, a veritable pearl of virtue, who so moves him that he marries her at the end to his nephew with whom she is in love. In the second, he finds Lison, a beautiful peasant girl, whom he seduces in a scene that might have been an episode of the Arabian Nights. Then he sets her up in Paris as the Marquise Zabeth, and secretly and silently falls in love with her. The poor girl is not a "drôlesse," and if she is no longer a virgin, she is certainly no demon. In

⁴ Gallus (the cock) looking for food found a pearl

fact, despairing at her lot, she commits suicide. Of this dénouement Paul de Saint-Victor said:

Up to this last scene, the play seemed like a "fête galante", an idyllic ballet, a romantic ravishment, with laughter and songs . . . duos by princes and chamberlains sparkling with epigrams . . . then, suddenly, an embittered heart disclosing itself, a black, smoldering resentment flashing forth . . . poison sucked from a ring and striking down with lightning speed, an execrable error bursting over the dead victim in an anguishing cry of love . . . I know nothing in the theater more heart-rending or more poignant

In 1881 readers marveled that Victor Hugo should produce in his eightieth year anything so apparently different from the rest of his work. We know today that the two plays were composed when the poet was fifteen years younger, but we can nevertheless see in them a demonstration of the extraordinary diversity of his talent.

VI

Torquemada, a play first conceived in 1859, was written in 1869, and published in 1882 at a time when Russian persecution of the Jews was attracting the attention of Europe. It deserves to be better known, for it contains some of the best analyses of character that Hugo ever wrote. Its plot, of course, is no better than Hugo's earlier ones. But the portrait of *Torquemada*, the fanatical head of the Spanish Inquisition, is admirable. Hugo keenly analyzes *Torquemada*'s amazing conviction that his mission is both holy and humane. The Inquisitor declares himself to be the bearer of salvation which all must receive. "I come," he exclaims, "to redeem the soul at the expense of the flesh." In a final outburst of devout zeal, he cries:

Je sèmerai les feux, les brandons, les clartés,
Les braises, et partout, au-dessus des cités,
Je ferai flamboyer l'autodafé suprême,
Joyeux, vivant, céleste! — O genre humain, je t'aime!

Paul Bourget, who at this date was still capable of impartial judgment on religious matters, admired greatly Hugo's analysis and the impression of terror so well created by the poet.

An indefinable anguish clutches your heart [he wrote], and the impression of power is so strong that the critic is silenced. There are certainly weaknesses, awkward scenes, very probably errors in Catholic doctrine, but how can one worry about them before the intensity of the vision of terror evoked by the poet.

The play is by no means as great as this brief quotation might suggest, but in Victor Hugo's repertory it deserves not to be neglected.

Meanwhile the year 1882 prepared a new tragedy for Victor Hugo, for the health of Juliette Drouet began to fail, though she concealed her condition as best she could. On November 25, 1882 she made her last public appearance at a performance of *Le Roi s'amuse*. Hugo's party, which included his grandchildren and his old friend Auguste Vacquerie as well as Mme Drouet, was photographed in his box, and one of the illustrated papers of the time devoted much space to the event. At the end of the performance, as he left the theater, the grand old man received an impressive, spontaneous ovation. According to Mme Richard Lesclide who was present, "every head was uncovered, and a compact double row of admirers in evening dress bowed respectfully as he passed between them." A few days later Mme Drouet was forced to take to her bed. The doctors discovered that she was suffering from a cancer of the stomach, and they gave her but a short time to live. The truth was kept from Hugo as long as possible. She lingered for a few months, but the end came on May 11, 1883.

Their liaison had lasted fifty years, and though Hugo had been guilty of infidelities, he was undoubtedly deeply attached to her and highly appreciative of her devotion. Their union had been consecrated by time, if not by the Church, and Juliette had finally been recognized as a kind of official, if not legal,

companion. Jules Claretie spoke only the truth when he wrote in *Le Temps*. "The white-haired woman whom we have lost will be inseparably associated in literary annals with the imperishable memory of Victor Hugo. There is a majestic dignity in the figure which she presents to us."

Her loss was a terrible blow to the poet and perhaps hastened his own end. His only publication after her burial was the final series of *La Légende des siècles*, all of which had been written much earlier. After his death several works appeared: *Le Théâtre en liberté* (in 1886) with its continuation and fulfillment of the vein so successfully opened up in *Les Deux Trouvailles de Gallus*; *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu* which we analyzed in an earlier chapter; *Toute la lyre* (1888-1899) which contains among other compositions the beautiful sonnet "Ave Dea, Moriturus te salutat" and the celebrated poem "Pour le tombeau de Théophile Gautier," judged by no less a person than M. Paul Valéry as one of the poetic masterpieces of the nineteenth century, *Les Années funestes* (1898) and *Dernière gerbe* (1902). To these must be added Hugo's travel books: *Alpes et Pyrénées* and *France et Belgique*, as well as *Choses vues* (1887-1900) and a portion of his letters. These prose writings confirmed what all impartial readers of Hugo's novels realized, that he was no less a master of French prose than of French poetry.

But to return to Hugo's last years, after the death of Juliette he visibly declined. His daughter-in-law, Mme Lockroy, surrounded him with every care and attention, he received on his eighty-third birthday another public ovation and even attended for a short while a great banquet given in his honor (though he was unable to make a speech and had to retire at nine o'clock), he found strength enough to give a small dinner-party now and then to intimate friends. On May 13, 1885 he gave a party of this nature, and seemed in reasonably good health. But in less than forty-eight hours he was visibly ill.

and took to his bed. On the eighteenth pneumonia aggravated his condition, and on May 22 he died.

Several years before his death the great poet had made arrangements for the preservation and publication of his manuscripts. He left them to the Bibliothèque Nationale, but entrusted the task of publishing any works which had not yet found their way into print to a board of three. Paul Meurice, Auguste Vacquerie, and Ernest Lefèvre. His fortune naturally went to his descendants. But on August 2, 1883 he wrote a letter addressed to Auguste Vacquerie in which he gave the following instructions

I give 50,000 francs to the poor
I wish to be carried to the cemetery in their hearse
I refuse the prayers of all churches
I believe in God

Of course these wishes were carried out. But while his body was, indeed, borne in the hearse of the poor, and the funeral was in no sense ecclesiastical, the occasion was nevertheless surrounded by unparalleled pomp and ceremony. The *veillée mortuaire* took place at the Arc de Triomphe which was veiled in black crepe. Horsemen holding lighted torches stood at each corner of the Arch and flags placed at appropriate intervals bore the titles of the poet's work. Maurice Barrès has described the scene in a well-known page of *Les Déracinés*.

It was a memorable sight, this coffin uplifted in the blackness of the night, somber itself at this height, while the green flames of the candelabra cast wan and desolate flickers of light on the imperial archway and were multiplied on the breast-plates of the horsemen holding their torches and restraining the crowd.

The next day six orations were delivered before the catafalque, Émile Augier, speaking for the French Academy, and Floquet, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, representing that famous body. When the speeches were over, the muffled drums

rolled, guns from the Paris forts boomed, and the funeral procession started on its slow march through Paris. A million people watched it pass, and ten thousand soldiers were required to hold them back in line. The Pantheon had been secularized by special decree, so it was there rather than to the cemetery of Père-Lachaise that the procession moved, and there on the afternoon of June 1, 1885 the mortal remains of Victor Hugo were laid to rest, beside the bones and ashes of those two great eighteenth-century writers and libertarians, Voltaire and Rousseau. "The funeral," wrote quite justly the correspondent of the *London Times*, "was the glorification of Democratic France."

CONCLUSION

VICTOR HUGO was something more than an important figure in literary history, a prose-writer of distinction and a poet of high renown. He was quite simply a great man. Not a perfect man, be it clearly understood, for like other mortals he had his defects. But his noble qualities stand forth in sharp outline. He was courageous and steadfast, devoted to great ideals, sincere and ardent in his convictions, progressive in his outlook, charitable and humane.

What a contrast between him and a man like Sainte-Beuve! The author of the *Lundis* was indubitably a talented and influential critic, but his jealousy, his meanness, and his treachery make him on the personal side a contemptible figure. How Victor Hugo's generosity shines in comparison! He extended to this confessed admirer of his wife the hand of friendship and said. "Let us hope that some day we shall find in this only reasons for being fonder of each other." Throughout the unsavory affair he displayed this high nobility.

Victor Hugo was a man of physical as well as moral courage. The former is evident in his activity during the Revolution of 1848, the June days of the same year, the *coup d'État* of 1851, and the siege of Paris. On all these occasions he exposed himself to danger. In February '48 he was in fact threatened with death by an excited workman armed with a gun. In June he went to the scene of fighting in a futile attempt to prevent the shedding of blood and was actually under fire. In 1851, as we have seen, he tried to organize resistance, went to the barricades, finally found himself hounded by the police, and forced to flee the country. In 1870 he chose to stay in Paris and endure the hardships and hazards of the siege.

His moral courage was displayed in manifold ways. First, by his espousal of causes before a majority had been won to their

support. Free, compulsory education, abolition of the death penalty, universal suffrage, and the doctrine of the right to work were principles that won his approval at the risk of being ridiculed by "practical" and "hard-headed" men. When convinced of the iniquity of the Roman expedition, he did not fail to condemn it, and his whole quarrel with Louis Napoleon, motivated as it was by fidelity to principle, is an illustration of courageous disinterestedness. Above all, his moral heroism is reflected in the steadfastness with which he endured a long and painful exile from his native land. Withstanding all temptation and pressure he remained unshaken in his determination to return to France only when liberty should again prevail.

The sincerity of Hugo's convictions has sometimes been questioned but is not open to doubt. Like many controversial figures, he evolved and, since he was neither a chameleon nor a weathercock, should be admired for his ability to change. For it was indicative of growth. On some issues he never altered. His patriotism was as ardent in 1827 as in 1870. His hatred of tyrants was consistent. His humanitarianism grew stronger with the years. On others, once he reached a mature conviction he was faithful to it. So it was with his republicanism. He needed decades to be persuaded, but after 1850 his attachment to the Republic shone with undiminished brightness and intensity to the very end.

His vitality was incredible, his nature at once exuberant and simple. The amount of work he turned out in his mature years as well as in his youth amazes posterity no less than his contemporaries. His exuberance doubtless explains his fondness for the ornate and the rococo. We have seen how he filled Hauteville House with every conceivable curio till it became more like a public museum than a private home. At the same time he knew when not to be complex. His love for children, for animals, and for external nature is a revelation of a genuine inner simplicity. His unfailing courtesy toward his inferiors and his dignified conduct toward those higher on the

social ladder spring from the same source. Most great men are characterized by at least some of these traits. Victor Hugo possessed them to a remarkable degree

We have said that he was not perfect, and, indeed, we cannot fail to observe that he was lacking in humility: he was egocentric to an unusual degree. His acceptance of table-tipping at Jersey is a weakness which many find it difficult to overlook. He was not always kind or tolerant to literary adversaries. But when such admissions have been made, one must still assert that there was in Hugo a large measure of undeniable greatness. Superior to many of his critics, to Montalembert, or Veuillot, or Thiers, he was one of the forward-looking men of his time, inspired by a genuine idealism without which it is surely difficult to achieve grandeur.

There was a time when it was fashionable to belittle Victor Hugo's poetry. The Symbolists protested against his eloquence and rhetoric. Tristan Corbière dubbed him a "garde-national épique," and Gustave Kahn, more moderate, wrote.

If Baudelaire, Villiers, Verlaine, and Mallarmé have occupied among the new writers this place of affection or this place of respect that the Romantics and the Parnassians gave to Hugo, is it not because Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and also Villiers had abandoned that Romantic goddess of the last hour, rhetoric? That rhetoric is the daughter of Hugo's eloquence, it borrowed from him its formulas, its redundancy, its ideas.¹

The Symbolist poets, Kahn implies, repudiated the essence of Hugo's genius.

But the epic and satiric talent of Victor Hugo, in which the rhetorical and the eloquent naturally play a legitimate part, need not be scorned because of the momentary irritation of young men in search of pure poetry. Every generation indulges in some such quest, redefines tragedy, novel, or lyric, and in

¹ G. Kahn, "Victor Hugo," *La Nouvelle Revue* (March 1, 1902)

its enthusiasm outlaws much if not all, of what has gone before. Posterity is not obliged to share these prejudices. Let us not then be afraid to assert that poems like "Aymerillot," "La Rose de l'Infante," "Les Pauvres Gens" are magnificent specimens of heroic poetry for which no apologies need be made. Let us recognize that the eloquent satire of *Les Châtiments* was not only sincere but justified. Let us realize that freedom and liberty were more than abstractions for Victor Hugo, that they represented great realities, and that when he upheld these ideals he was speaking of eternal truths and eternal values. Today, in the early 1940's with Europe enslaved in an unspeakable tyranny, we can understand that better than could the Symbolists. Before the war André Gide, asked to name the greatest French poet, replied, "Victor Hugo, hélas!" Since 1940 Frenchmen have found in Hugo's poetry an expression of their deepest emotions, they have understood the exile of Guernsey and the besieged Parisian of 1870 as never before.

But the essence of Hugo's genius, as we have seen throughout this study, is by no means limited to eloquence and rhetoric. We need only recall that poems like "Nuits de juin" and "Spectacle rassurant" in *Les Rayons et les ombres* or "Crépuscule" in *Les Contemplations* are quite the opposite of the rhetorical. In such poems Hugo excels in simplicity and becomes precisely the kind of poet whom the Symbolists should have admired. His poems on childhood are a reflection of that same inward and spiritual grace. The touching lines on his daughter's death are expressed in the language of the common man.

From a simple and direct rendition of the mystery of the universe Hugo passed frequently to a vision of things in which the great enigma of human fate is suggested in accents quite unknown to the other Romantic poets. In "Paroles sur la dune," written on the anniversary of his arrival in Jersey, he translates his disquietude:

Je suis triste et je marche au bord des cieux profonds
Courbé comme celui qui songe

Je regarde, au-dessus du mont et du vallon
 Et des mers sans fin remuées
 S'envoler sous le bec du vautour aquilon
 Toute la toison des nuées;
 J'entends le vent dans l'air, la mer sur le récif,
 L'homme liant la gerbe mûre,
 J'écoute, et je confronte en mon esprit pensif
 Ce qui parle à ce qui murmure.
 Et je reste parfois couché sans me lever
 Sur l'herbe rare de la dune,
 Jusqu'à l'heure où l'on voit apparaître et rêver
 Les yeux sinistres de la lune

Comme le souvenir est voisin du remords
 Comme à pleurer tout nous ramène!
 Et que je te sens froide en te touchant, ô mort,
 Noir verrou de la porte humaine

This is, indeed, as M. Charpentier says, the "special accent of Victor Hugo" which continues to develop through the last section of *Les Contemplations* into the *Légende des siècles* and the apocalyptic visions of *Dieu*. The later poems are more complex, but the rôle of sensation and intuition is essentially the same. The ideas expressed are rarely the product of close, deductive reasoning, but rather the result of Hugo's capacity for spontaneous insight and prophecy. They are nonetheless interesting in their metaphysical implications and nonetheless beautiful.

What diverse talent, what inexhaustible inspiration, what power of language and imagery Hugo's poetry reveals! Not only does he express as Baudelaire said long ago, "the mystery of life," but "no artist is more universal than he, more apt to put himself in contact with the forces of universal life, more disposed to bathe himself incessantly in nature." And Baudelaire recognized too, his extraordinary virtuosity in the manipulation of language, his capacity for "cutting out, in his stanzas, the unforgettable shape of things," and for "illuminating them

with their proper color." The leading French poet of our own day, M. Paul Valéry, has paid similar tribute.

For more than sixty years [he writes] this extraordinary man . . . unremittingly sought to bring about new combinations of language, to will them, to solicit them and to have the satisfaction of hearing them respond . . . He unquestionably sinned more and more against selection . . . Yet what stupendous poems he wrote . . . poems incomparable in extent, in external organization, in resonance, in plentitude! In the *Corde d'aram*, in *Dieu*, in *La Fin de Satan*, in the piece on the death of Gautier . . . [he] attained the highest point of poetic power and of the noble science of versification.²

With these judgments there is now almost universal agreement.³

Admiration for Hugo's poetry has been widespread for many years. Enthusiasm for his prose has lagged behind. This is quite understandable in the light of modern impatience with melodramatic and absurd plots. The action of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, of *Les Travaillcurs de la mer* and *L'Homme qui rit* is so incredible and the characters of those novels so unreal that only the most determined and resolute readers discover the great beauties which lie hidden in their pages. Something of the same fate has overtaken *Les Misérables* and *Quatrevingt-treize* which deserve it less, for here, in addition to admirable descriptions, are credible, interesting characters. In all five novels Hugo stands revealed as a writer of magnificent prose.

Conscious throughout his career of the importance of style, Victor Hugo sought to achieve the maximum of literary beauty. In 1834 he declared:

Beautiful expression embellishes thought and preserves it. It is at once an adornment and an armor. Style clothing an idea is like enamel covering a tooth.

Design! Design! That is the first law of all art. And do not think that this law diminishes liberty or nature in any way.

² P. Valéry, *Variaité*, II (1930).

³ For a good, objective, American opinion of Hugo, see the chapter on the poet in Horatio Smith's *Masters of French Literature* (N. Y., 1937).

Without style and without design . . . you will not achieve true triumph, true glory, true conquest, true laurels. — *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*

To this ideal he remained faithful as long as he could wield a pen, without, however, falling into the limitations of Art for Art's sake, and without diluting in any marked degree the sincerity and the spontaneity of his inspiration. For whenever he wrote, as he continually said, he felt exalted.⁴

His prose is both melodious and balanced, infinitely colorful and varied, but solidly constructed. All the elements of his composition — the novel in its entirety, the chapter, the paragraph, the sentence, the individual word, received his most careful attention. Nor was the immensity of his vocabulary a barrier to this meticulous care. He felt no need to limit himself to achieve a definite effect. Economy he considered synonymous with sterility. Words tumbled and poured from his pen, but they were not uncontrolled. Somehow the novelist maintained complete mastery. His power over the written word was little short of miraculous.

Less known among his prose writings than others is the volume entitled *Choses vues*, one of the posthumous publications. It is not a detailed diary, but a collection of notes, some long, some short, kept by Hugo during a period of thirty years. Not intended for immediate publication they are characterized by a greater sobriety of style than most of his prose. Lucid, concrete, and direct, they suggest that Hugo would have made an excellent reporter. Whether he is telling of the funeral ceremonies held for Napoleon in 1840, or sketching portraits of confrères in the Assembly of 1848, or describing the death and burial of Balzac, he never wastes words, but records the central fact or impression which he reinforces with only the necessary embellishments. "He excels," says M. Levaillant, "in finding in the passing scene the striking detail, in conversations the

⁴ See M. A. Le Dû, *Le Groupement ternaire dans la prose de V. Hugo, romancier* (Paris 1929), Introduction, p. 8.

characteristic word, in faces the dominant trait." With this opinion all but the most prejudiced will surely agree.

In 1829, after the reading of *Marion de Lorme* before the great Cénacle, Alfred de Vigny confided to his *Journal* an extremely unfavorable opinion of his friend Hugo. "No one," he wrote, "has ever had as much form and as little thought. He never has an idea which is truly his own, not a conviction, not an observation on life, or a timeless revery." This caustic judgment formulated at an early date a critical reaction to Victor Hugo which has not been universal, yet by no means rare. Late in the nineteenth century, for example, Bourget and Brunetière held that the author of *La Légende des siècles* had not the slightest trace of an analytical mind. Such views may contain an atom of truth, but in their widespread implications they are profoundly unjust.

That Victor Hugo did not have a highly original mind and that he was not a philosopher in the sense that Descartes, Condillac, and Kant were philosophers can readily be admitted. He was nevertheless an intelligent as well as a gifted man. The critical articles he wrote for the *Muse française*, the *Préface de Cromwell*, and the preface to *Hernani*, some of the pages of *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, sections of his *William Shakespeare*, reveal a keen literary perception. He did not develop, like Hippolyte Taine or Brunetière, a complex critical system, but his reactions were frequently penetrating and sound. There are few who do not agree with his judgment of Scott's *Quentin Durward* and Vigny's *Éloa* — Vigny, incidentally might have been more grateful — few who have not quoted with approval his famous definition of romanticism "le libéralisme en littérature", few who question the insight of his dictum that "Boileau represents the monarchy no less than Louis XIV"; few (since 1870) who have not taken satisfaction in the epithet with which he branded Louis Napoleon; few who have not echoed the "frisson nouveau" with which he character-

ized *Les Fleurs du mal*. These are not the vaporizings of a stupid man but the observations of a lucid intelligence.

His philosophical ideas, as we have seen, are stimulating and interesting. From a rather conventional orthodoxy in his youth, he moved with greater maturity through a provisional skepticism to the elaboration of a complex set of beliefs. The double nature of man, the notion of the vitality of the whole universe, the benevolent existence of an all-wise Deity, the doctrine of metempsychosis, the moral progress of humanity, and the immortality of the soul are some of the concepts which he defined in poetic lines of great beauty. All of these ideas were in circulation before his day, but he made them his own and he expressed them as only a very talented poet could. Sections of "Le Satyre," of "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre," and "Les Mages," of *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu* easily compete with the best philosophical poems of the Western World.

His political beliefs were not original either, but were sincerely, skillfully, and provocatively expressed. Throughout his life he was a great humanitarian, believing with all his mind and heart that the lot of the common man could and should be improved. Not a socialist — except in a vague and incorrect sense — he was nevertheless liberal and progressive, desirous of moving gradually forward toward the goal of a better society. For a long time he believed that this goal could be achieved by a constitutional but strong monarchy or empire. When experience stripped this illusion from him, he rallied to the cause of the Republic, and fought unremittingly for its establishment and its preservation. But he had the intelligence always to recognize that political form alone was insufficient. The problem of poverty could doubtless be better solved by a republic than by a monarchy, but it would not be done automatically. Men of good will would still have to labor and toil to bring this miracle to pass. And he believed that within the framework of the capitalistic system this achievement was possible.

In short, Victor Hugo was extraordinarily representative of his age. The nineteenth century, which he almost spanned, was traversed by a certain number of conflicts: romanticism versus classicism, science versus religion, Church versus State, monarchy versus republic, useful art versus Art for Art's sake. All are reflected in varying degrees in Victor Hugo's work and career. If the nineteenth century had any positive belief it was that democracy and science would usher in the millennium; democracy would give men liberty, science would give them comfort. Poverty, tyranny, and war would be abolished. Victor Hugo shared that belief and became one of its most eloquent exponents. The seventeenth century is commonly called in France "The Century of Louis the Great", the eighteenth, "The Century of Voltaire", the nineteenth is far too complex to be summed up in the person of one man, but if we attempted to do so, we should undoubtedly have to call it "The Century of Victor Hugo."

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Published before Hugo's death were 48 volumes of *Œuvres complètes, ne varietur*, Hetzel, 1880-1885. Sixteen volumes were added from 1886 to 1892.

Various critical editions of individual works have appeared and will be indicated under appropriate chapters.

Two volumes of *Correspondance* appeared in 1896-1898, the *Lettres à la fiancée* in 1891, and a volume entitled *Correspondance entre Victor Hugo et Paul Meurice* in 1909. A few additional letters have made their way into print in various books and periodicals.

The autobiographical list is not voluminous. For the early part of Hugo's career there is always the *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie* dictated by the poet to his wife and published in two volumes in 1863. It is not completely reliable and should be used with caution. For the middle period there are the two volumes of *Choses vues*, first published in 1887 and 1900 but better consulted now in the Ollendorff edition. For this same period one should also consult *Actes et paroles* which first appeared in three volumes in 1875-76. The first two volumes of *Actes et paroles* have been issued in the Ollendorff-Michel edition and contain extremely valuable notes.

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The list of general bibliography is extensive. Edmond Biré was one of the first to enter the field with his four volumes *Victor Hugo avant 1830*, Gervais, 1883, *Victor Hugo après 1830*, 2 vols., Perrin, 1891, *Victor Hugo après 1852*, Perrin, 1894. Biré was almost fanatically hostile to Hugo, he opposed the poet on political and religious grounds, he disliked Hugo's personality. His four works contain a lot of information, some of which is still useful, but they need always to be checked for inaccuracies or prejudiced interpretations. On the other hand, the biog-

raphy written by A Barbou, *La Vie de Victor Hugo*, 1902, is even more unreliable in spite of the fact that Barbou knew Hugo and claimed to have obtained many details from the poet himself, for Barbou had no critical sense and blindly praised everything. E Dupuy's *Victor Hugo L'Homme et le poète*, Lecène et Oudin, 1886, was one of the earliest attempts by a competent scholar to do justice to the poet's work and to his character. The volume can still be read with pleasure and profit, but is naturally outdated. Much the same can be said of L Mabillean's *Victor Hugo*, Hachette, 1893.

In 1925 Mary Duclaux published her *Victor Hugo* (Plon) which was quickly followed by an English edition. The book is charmingly written, but it is neither complete nor sufficiently scholarly. Two years later, in 1927, one of the greatest Hugo scholars, M Paul Berret, published his *Victor Hugo* (Garnier). It is a valuable *mise-au-point*, but M Berret chose in my opinion an unfortunate arrangement, separating in an artificial way the poet's life from his work. His account of Hugo's public career is less shrewd than one might wish. In 1929 R Escholier's *La Vie glorieuse de Victor Hugo* (Plon) appeared. Escholier, as the curator of the Musée Victor Hugo (in the Place des Vosges) and as a novelist of some distinction, was in a position to produce an interesting volume. It is, of course, very readable, but from the point of view of completeness and scholarly reliability very disappointing. In 1935 G Brunet brought out a *Victor Hugo* (Rieder) timed as a contribution to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death. It is short and semi-popular. And in 1937 Léon Daudet published *La Tragique Existence de Victor Hugo* (A Michel). Daudet's work is of course unreliable. We include it here simply because of Daudet's connection with the Hugo family.

In English the work of A F Davidson, *Victor Hugo His Life and Work*, London, 1912, follows far too closely the work of Biré. Mme Duclaux's *Victor Hugo* has already been mentioned. The best popular biography in our tongue is undoubtedly that of Mr Matthew Josephson — *Victor Hugo*, N Y, 1942 — which nevertheless goes astray on a certain number of important points (as indicated in my preface).

A good book dealing with Hugo's major works is that of André Bellessort, *Victor Hugo, essai sur son œuvre*, Perrin 1929. Bellessort is always shrewd and penetrating in his literary judgments, though they are somewhat colored by his conservatism in political and religious matters.

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M Paul Berret has made Hugo's *Légende des siècles* almost his private scholarly domain. His monumental edition in six volumes of Hugo's epics, Hachette, 1920-1926, remains unsurpassed. And he has made some of his work more readily available in a one-volume study entitled *La Légende des siècles de Victor Hugo Étude et analyse*, Mellottée, 1935

Mr H J Hunt's *The Epic in nineteenth-century France*, Oxford, 1941, is an important contribution. Not that he has added much to our direct knowledge of *La Légende des siècles*, it is difficult to do that after M Berret. But Mr Hunt has placed the *Légende des siècles* in admirable perspective by setting it in its appropriate position in the history of the nineteenth-century epic with its humanitarian developments.

See also E Rigal, *Victor Hugo, poète épique*, 1900, J Fourcassié, "Sur les sources de poèmes pryéniens de Victor Hugo," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1935, G H Gifford, "Hugo's *Pleine Mer* and the Great Eastern," *Pub Modern Lang Association of America*, 1930, M Saint-René, *Victor Hugo et la Légende des siècles*, Bibliothèque des études pratiques, 1930.

CHAPTER XII

In addition to the work of Berret, Hunt, Renouvier, and Saurat already listed, see Liou Kim-Lung, *Étude sur l'art de V Hugo dans la Fin de Satan*, Nizet et Bastard, 1939, Ch Baudoin, "L'Influence de la *Divine Épopée* d'A Soumet sur la *Fin de Satan* de V Hugo," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1936. M Rudwin's *Satan et le satanisme dans l'œuvre de V Hugo*, Les Belles Lettres, 1927, is disappointing.

CHAPTER XIII

The best edition of *Les Misérables* is the Ollendorff edition which contains a valuable *Reliquat* and much editorial apparatus. In 1927, Gustave Simon published the manuscript of the early version entitled *Les Misères* (Editions Baudinière). Concerning the sources one should consult R Dumesnil, "L'Origine de deux livres des *Misérables*," *Mercure de France*, 1911, R Messac, "Autour de Gavroche," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1928, A Le Breton, "Réalité et fiction. Le vrai Petit-Picpus des *Misérables*," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, July 15, 1925, B Barberry, "L'Évêque et le Conventionnel des *Misérables*," *Mercure de France*, June 15, 1935. A useful though incomplete study of the novel is E Benoit-Lévy's little book, *Les Misérables de V Hugo*, Paris, Malfère, 1929. P Berret in his *Victor Hugo*, 1927 and A Bellessort in his *V Hugo, Essai sur son œuvre* included interesting and valuable chapters on *Les Misérables*. One can also consult with profit appropriate pages in J M Guyau's *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, Paris, Alcan, 1914, and Renouvier's *Victor Hugo le philosophe*, Paris, Colin, 1900. For details on the publication see the *Correspondance entre Victor Hugo et Paul Meurice*, Paris, Charpentier, 1909.

CHAPTER XIV

On Hugo's *William Shakespeare*, see the Ollendorff edition and the article by C Daubray, "Sur le *Wm Shakespeare* de V Hugo," *Revue de France*, March 15, 1937.

A good treatment of *Les Chansons des rues et des bois* is that of A. Bellessort in his *Victor Hugo Essai sur son œuvre*, Perrin, 1929.

CHAPTER XV

Les Travailleurs de la mer has not received the close attention of scholars. One may consult J. K. Ditchy, *La Mer dans l'œuvre littéraire de V. Hugo*, Les Belles Lettres, 1925.

Concerning *L'Homme qui rit*, see C. M. Maclean, "Victor Hugo's Use of *Les Délices de la Grande Bretagne* in *L'Homme qui rit*," *Modern Language Review*, 1913, and "Victor Hugo's Use of Chamberlayne's *L'État présent de l'Angleterre*," also in the *Modern Language Review*, 1913, P. Berret, "Les Comprachicos et la mutilation de Gwynplaine dans *L'Homme qui rit* Étude de sources," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1914, E. Meyer, "Un cas d'incontinence verbale *L'Homme qui rit* de V. Hugo," *Revue des cours et conférences*, 1926, J. H. Thomas, *L'Angleterre dans l'œuvre litt. de V. Hugo*, Pedone, 1933. The Ollendorff edition contains, of course, much valuable material for both these novels.

CHAPTER XVI

Much of the bibliography listed under Chapter VIII is appropriate here. See also my article "Exile's Return," *Romancé Review*, 1939.

Hugo's sojourn at Vianden has been treated by J. d'Ardenne in the *Annales politiques et littéraires*, 1912-13.

CHAPTER XVII

In addition to the Ollendorff edition see L. Havet, "Sur l'usage fait par V. Hugo pour *Quatrevingt-treize* du Dictionnaire franco-normand de G. Métivier," *Revue critique*, 1874, P. Berret, "Comment V. Hugo prépara son roman historique de *Quatrevingt-treize*," *Revue universitaire*, 1914, Florence Page, "Une source de Victor Hugo *Quatrevingt-treize*," *Modern Language Review*, 1919, E. Aubrée, *La Tourgue de Victor Hugo dans la forêt de Fougères*, Champion, 1930.

CHAPTER XVIII

Consult E. Biré, *Victor Hugo après 1852*, Perrin, 1894, R. Escholier, *Victor Hugo raconté par ceux qui l'ont vu*, Stock, 1932, and such works as A. Asseline, *Victor Hugo intime*, 1885, R. Lesclide, *Propos de table de V. Hugo*, 1885, J. Claretie, *Victor Hugo Souvenirs intimes*, 1902.

CONCLUSION

Without attempting to list here all the critical appreciations of Victor Hugo from Swinburne to Valéry, attention may be called to a few. One of the most effective replies to the charge that Hugo lacked intelligence is that made by A. Thibaudet, "Victor Hugo était-il intelligent?" *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Oct. 1, 1934. In connection with the Cinquantenaire,

two defenders of Hugo arose G Ascoli, "Réponse à quelques détracteurs de Victor Hugo," *Bibliothèque de la Fondation Victor Hugo*, Droz, 1935. Inspired by the same event Y Le Dantec wrote his excellent article, "Victor Hugo poète lyrique," for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, June 1, 1935, and Henri Peyre an extremely penetrating essay which he later included in his volume *Hommes et œuvres du vingtième siècle*, Corrêa, 1938.

If we go back to the time of the Centenaire, we find valuable articles by G Kahn, "Victor Hugo," *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1902, and "Victor Hugo et la critique," *Revue blanche*, 1902.

Some of the studies mentioned in the introductory part of this bibliography are pertinent here, particularly the *Étude sur Victor Hugo* of F Gregh (Fasquelle, 1904, new edition, Flammarion, 1933), Bellessort's *Victor Hugo, essai sur son œuvre*, Perrin, 1929, Berret's *Victor Hugo*, Garnier, 1927 and Hofmannsthal's *Essai sur Victor Hugo*, Droz, 1937.

W F Giese's *Victor Hugo The Man and the Poet*, N Y, 1926, is a virulent and unjust estimate of Hugo and his poetry. A much fairer judgment is that by Horatio Smith in his volume *Masters of French Literature* (N Y, 1937).

One of the most recent supporters of Victor Hugo in this country is J Barzun, see his *Romanticism and the Modern Ego*, Boston, 1943.

In spite of the hundreds of articles and books dealing with Hugo and his work, there is still room for more. Perhaps the most serious lacuna is a complete and genuinely critical edition of the poet's correspondence. An edition such as has been done for Rousseau is badly needed. A critical edition of the *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie* would also be useful. Critical editions of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and above all of *Les Misérables* are highly desirable.

The definitive work on Hugo's philosophy has not yet been written, though useful contributions have been made by Guyau, Renouvier, Saurat, Hunt, and Viatte. Also still to be written is a satisfactory treatment of Hugo's knowledge and use of classical antiquity and the extent and manner of its influence on his mind and art. Guizard's *Virgile et Victor Hugo*, Bloud, 1910, is, as someone has said, a good chapter in such a general study.

The sources of *Les Travailleurs de la mer* need investigation. In fact, the theme of the sea in all its details and ramifications deserves to be more thoroughly and comprehensively treated than it has been so far. Ditchy's little volume on this subject is a useful introduction to the subject.

Hugo's reputation and influence both in his own country and abroad are important subjects that await either more skillful or more thorough study. Such essays or theses as we have are generally too limited in scope.

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